Roger Foster

Adorno

The Recovery of Experience

Adorno

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Dennis J. Schmidt, editor

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For Hildy

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Acknowledgments

My engagement with Adorno began a decade ago under the auspices of Doug Moggach in the PhD program of the University of Ottawa. My ambition at the time was to rescue Adorno's contribution to critical social theory from under the weight of its Habermasian critique. That project first crystallized during a stay at Frankfurt in 1997–1998 which, in large part because of Axel Honneth's encouragement, proved to be an incomparable intellectual experience. This book began from a sense that the completion of that project did not really touch the core of what Adorno was all about. In trying to make sense of why that was so, I have benefited in the interim from conversations with Jay Bernstein, whose work on Adorno has been a continual point of intellectual reference. Brian O'Connor and Tom Huhn have supported this project from the beginning. I hope it is a better work for their advice and encouragement. I couldn't have completed a project like this without an outlet from the wastes of Adornian abstraction. I am grateful in particular to two of my colleagues at BMCC, Matthew Ally and Jack Estes, for their disinclination to take Adorno too seriously. The professional insight of Ron Hayduk was also invaluable.

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NOTE ON TRANSLATION

All the translations from German and French original sources in this work are my own.

INTRODUCTION

The Theory of Spiritual Experience

> The truths seized directly by the intelligence in the full light of the world have something that is less profound, less necessary than those which life has communicated to us in spite of ourselves, in an impression that is material because it entered by way of the senses, but of which we can discern the spirit. In sum . . . sensations must be interpreted as the signs of so many laws and ideas, in order to think, or to draw out of the shadows what I had experienced, to convert it in to a spiritual equivalent.
>
> —Marcel Proust, *Time Regained*

> Literature ought only to depict a woman as bearing, as if she were a mirror, the colors of the tree or the river near which we typically represent her to ourselves.
>
> —Marcel Proust, *The Guermantes Way*

> The gaze that in interpreting a phenomenon becomes aware of more than what it merely is, and solely thereby, of what it is, secularizes metaphysics.
>
> —Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectic*

The quotes from Proust above articulate both what is involved in the idea of spiritual experience, the interpretation of what strikes the senses as something that is at the same time "spiritual," and also provide in miniature a depiction of the literary technique that is supposed to recover the idea of spiritual experience. The experiential item, Proust suggests, is to be read as a surface on which is inscribed a contextual whole, the immanent universal or "essence" of that item. The main idea behind the notion of spiritual experience can be

understood as a type of interpretation that saturates the object with meanings derived from how it appears as significant or meaningful for a subject. The project of a recovery of spiritual experience, and the construction of a type of philosophical writing that would be able to put this in to practice, is the unifying core to Adorno's strikingly multidisciplinary oeuvre.[1] The introduction to *Negative Dialectic*, which perhaps more than any other of Adorno's writings contains the methodological key to his work, had originally carried the title of a "theory of spiritual experience." The introduction, Adorno writes, is intended to expound the "concept of philosophical experience" (1966, 10). Adorno's understanding of dialectic must be seen in terms of this project. It was in the form of a highly original version of dialectic that Adorno found the solution to the philosophical recovery of spiritual experience. From the time of the 1931 *Antrittsvorlesung*, Adorno had sought to elucidate a type of reading in which particular items (whether philosophical concepts, musical pieces, artworks, social objects, etc.) would be interpreted as the locus of an immanent universal. Each particular thereby becomes a microcosm, where every element of that particular is a cipher that, when appropriately interpreted, can be made to reveal an aspect of that particular's spiritual significance. The reference to this type of experience as "spiritual," *geistig*, is intended to distinguish it from the empiricist notion of experience. What is distinctive about spiritual experience is that the multilayered relations of a thing with other things outside it, and eventually the entirety of its context, are allowed to inform the cognitive significance of that thing. Rather than moving from the particular to the general by the abstraction of a common property from the object in question, spiritual experience moves from the particular to the universal by reweaving the threads of significance that link the object to its context. The universal is not brought to bear as a classification of the particular (where this implies the abstraction of a common property), it is rather constructed; the universal is simply the totality formed by the different chains of relational significance that make the object intelligible as the kind of object that it is. And these chains themselves are constructed by the interpretation of the elements that form the particular's surface. In the case of a philosophical text, the elements in question will be comprised of particular examples, turns of phrase, transition points of an argument, definitions, and elucidations. In the case of musical works, these elements will include phrases, melodic arrangements, and the technical structure. In sociological analysis, the elements will be present as the behaviors and characteristics of a thing, and the history of its interactions.

Whatever it is that is made the object of spiritual experience (and a guiding theme of Adorno's thinking is that anything can potentially become such an object), the important thing is that this item is interpreted as the bearer of an immanent universal. Adorno developed this idea in opposition to the type

of universal that figures in the classifying function of concepts. The classificatory operation of concepts is essentially the procedure that Kant (1974) describes as "determinate" judgment. Classification involves the subsumption of a particular under a pregiven concept, by treating that particular as an instance of a universal property. The particular is recognized (classified) as exhibiting an ideally detachable characteristic that it potentially shares with other things. Kant contrasts this structure with "reflective" or aesthetic judgment, in which judgment has to go in search of the concept, or perhaps even construct a new one, starting from the particular.[2] The concept, in this case, is dependent on its object in a new and radical sense, because it emerges only through the interrogation of the material qualities of that particular object. This idea provides a useful frame for understanding the structure of spiritual experience. In spiritual experience, the particular is directly the *expression* of a universal, not an instantiation of a universal property. In other words, the universal is not detachable from the particular as a repeatable property because it is the figure formed by the deciphering of the contextual significance of its elements. Adorno develops and employs the idea of spiritual experience in the context of a radical critique of the model of philosophical cognition as classification under concepts. The point is not to dispense with classificatory knowing. Adorno's intention is rather to circumscribe it. Rather than constituting the whole of philosophical cognition, Adorno wants to demarcate classification as part of a far broader notion of philosophical understanding that encompasses a richer view of cognitively significant experience. In this richer view, the particular does not figure solely as a replaceable item, an instance of something it has in common with other things. Each thing, rather, forms a legible surface, from which a universal uniquely and materially tied to that thing is constructed. The universal is reflected in it, as the unique configuration formed by its manifold relations to other things.

It has long been established in Adorno scholarship that experience plays a crucial role in Adorno's critique of modern philosophy and is also central to his social-critical writings.[3] The modern world, for Adorno, is marked primarily by a transformation in the structure of experience, a structure that is reflected in the theoretical self-understandings of that world produced by philosophy. Adorno tends to describe this structure in terms such as "withered" or "restricted" experience. It is the legacy of that historical process that Max Weber famously described as one of disenchantment.[4] This much may be readily accepted, but my claim that Adorno's key counterconcept to the disenchanted structure of experience is spiritual experience deserves a fuller explanation since, as far as I am aware, there exists no extended treatment of this idea in the existing secondary literature on Adorno. First, then, a note on translation. The usual translation of *geistige Erfahrung* into English in Adorno's works has been "intellectual experience."[5] My dissatisfaction with

this translation is that it seems to reinforce precisely that model of the role of the subject in experience that Adorno wants to oppose with the idea of *geistige Erfahrung*. In other words, it does not convey the idea of using the subject to disclose the truth about the object. To call an experience "intellectual" suggests, perhaps, that it is disembodied, more a reflection of who does the thinking than a disclosure of the world. To call it "spiritual" experience, of course, also risks significant misunderstandings. But the risks, I believe, are outweighed by the need to maintain the perceptible link with the Hegelian notion of *Geist* and *geistig*, as well as the Proustian understanding of *expérience spirituelle*.

Adorno began to use the term *geistige Erfahrung* while working on a series of lectures on Hegel in the late fifties and early sixties, work that Adorno described as "preparation for a revised conception of the dialectic" (1993b, xxxvi). Adorno here speaks of *geistige Erfahrung* in terms of the "experiential substance *of* Hegel's philosophy," as opposed to the "experiential content *in* Hegel's philosophy" (1993b, 54). Whereas the latter would comprise the operation of concepts as the tools of determinate judgment, the former is defined in terms of "the compelling force of the objective phenomena that have been reflected in [Hegel's] philosophy and are sedimented in it." These phenomena are not present *in* concepts as their content. Instead they represent the embeddedness of the philosophical concept in a network of extraphilosophical relations that are reflected in it. Therefore, the experiential substance of a concept cannot be revealed in terms of how that concept determines a specific content (its functioning as subsumption); it relies on the possibility of the concept functioning within language as expression. I will argue in this work that Adorno understands the expressive force of the concept in terms of its potential to disclose (or show) more than it says. The constellational form that Adorno endorses for philosophy then becomes intelligible as the attempt to coax concepts toward the disclosure of what they express in language. The goal of philosophical writing (stated in the baldest terms) is to arrange words around a concept, so that the experiential substance of that concept becomes visible in it. When this process succeeds, the result is what Adorno calls spiritual experience.

The determining role of concepts can be understood as the subsumption of sensuous content under rules that insert that content into a structured set of rational relations.[6] Concepts, as forms of determinate judgment, determine the inferential relations between conceptual contents, that is, the connectives that link one conceptual content with another. What it means for something to be a conceptual content is therefore for it to be capable of serving in a series of inferential roles.[7] Adorno does not want to criticize determinate judgment per se; what he is criticizing is the identification of determinate judgment with cognitively significant experience. Presupposed in the working of determinate

judgment, Adorno believes, is a conception of experiential items as repeatable exemplars.[8] To "determine" a particular content is to constitute it as fit to serve in a particular inferential role, a role that could just as well be played by any other item with the same set of inferential licenses. Now what Adorno means by the moment of expression in concepts implies a broader notion of how concepts can function in cognition. The expression of experiential substance in concepts is concerned with the intrinsically historical meanings that are picked up by the concept via relations of contiguity and proximity. This point foregrounds two centrally important features: (1) the experiential substance of concepts must be understood as the *historical* world; and (2) what a concept expresses is not reducible to the inferential relations it licenses (since what it expresses depends on the concept's proximity to a historical context). In its character as expression, the concept enters into relations with other meanings by virtue of sharing a historical world. These relations are eliminated in the reduction of the cognitive significance of the concept to *purely* inferential relations or (what I am claiming is the same thing) determinate judgment. Adorno, I will argue, believes that this insight into the dependence of the concept on historical experience provides the basis for a second Copernican turn that reverses the Kantian turn to the constituting subject.

Adorno's reflections on *geistige Erfahrung* find their culmination in the introduction to *Negative Dialectic* (1966), which Adorno intended to be an exposition of spiritual experience. By my count, the phrase *geistige Erfahrung* occurs a total of nine times in the introduction.[9] It recurs on a further two occasions in the rest of the entire book.[10] It is easy to lose sight of the importance of this term in the text as a whole, as the range of the qualifiers attached to the term experience in this work is truly staggering. The introduction alone contains references to "philosophical experience" (p. 50), "political experience" (p. 60), "bodily experience" (p. 60), "temporal experience" (p. 62), and, of course, "full, unreduced experience" (p. 25). This is not to mention the rest of the work, which includes references to "living experience" (p. 380), "genuine experience" (p. 114), "unregimented experience" (p. 129), "unleashed [*ungegängelt*] experience" (p. 295), and in part III, numerous references to "metaphysical" experience.

However, Adorno's lectures on negative dialectic delivered in the 1965/1966 winter semester at Frankfurt University, lectures delivered very shortly before the publication of *Negative Dialectic*, provide substantial support for the thesis that this work as a whole can be understood as an elucidation of the idea of spiritual experience. While retaining the basic idea of the earlier Hegel lectures that spiritual experience involves the interpretation of "any and every existing thing as something that is at the same time spiritual [*geistig*]" (1993b, 57), the lectures on negative dialectic make clear the pivotal role of spiritual experience as a counterconcept to the withering of experience,

and provide more explicit details on how it is supposed to work. Adorno describes spiritual experience as a "spiritualization [*Spiritualisierung*] of the world" that goes beyond "mere, immediate sensuous experience" (2003a, 132). Elsewhere in the lectures, spiritual experience is described as the counterconcept to "all that which, since it can be described as the so called regulated process [*geregelter Fortgang*] of abstraction or as mere subsumption under concepts, is in the broadest sense mere technique" (p. 126). The clearest answer as to how spiritualization is supposed to be achieved, in opposition to the dry work of abstraction and the dull logic of conceptual subsumption, is given in Adorno's notes for lecture eighteen. The first comment on Adorno's (as always) sparse notes for this lecture runs: "*Why* the complete (*voll*) subject is necessary for the experience of objectivity" (p. 185). Adorno then remarks that "[t]he elimination of subjective qualities always corresponds to a reduction of the object." Thus the more that reactions are eliminated as "merely subjective," the more one loses the "qualitative determinations of the thing." The central condition for the recovery of spiritual experience, Adorno is suggesting, is the rediscovery of the cognitive role of the experiencing subject. The 1965/1966 lectures also provide a clear indication of where to look for an understanding of the formative encounters through which Adorno developed this idea of spiritual experience. This would be among the generation that Adorno refers to as *meine geistige Eltern* (literally, "my spiritual parents" [p. 106]). In particular, Adorno singles out Husserl, Bergson, and Proust.

This study will attempt to show that the idea of spiritual experience is indispensable for understanding Adorno's concept of philosophy as a type of negative dialectic. In the process, I will try to substantiate Adorno's claim that spiritual experience requires a changed view of the role of the subject in cognition. I will do so, centrally, by developing the idea of spiritual experience through an investigation of Adorno's relationship to Husserl, Bergson, and Proust. This, however, is only half the story. For Adorno's idea of philosophy as a negative dialectic will be incomprehensible unless we can make sense of Adorno's reflections on philosophical language, and in particular his repeated reference to philosophy as a struggle to "say the unsayable." What is centrally important to this understanding of philosophy, I will argue, is a distinction between what language expresses or shows, as opposed to what it "says." Our cognitive concepts have, to a large extent, become inoculated against the type of discursive presentation that would present objects as "at the same time something spiritual." This is why, for Adorno, the recovery of spiritual experience must take the form of a struggle to say something that cannot be said in the language we have in which to say it. I will try to show in the course of this work that this idea is anything but a resigning of philosophy to an empty circularity. The chapters on Adorno's relation to Wittgenstein and Benjamin (chapters 2–3) are

intended to expound on this important aspect of the theory of spiritual experience as a form of negative dialectic.

The method of elucidation of Adorno's idea of a recovery of experience in this book will be primarily indirect, in the sense that I will try to excavate the sense of this idea by reflecting it through surrounding texts and theoretical contributions, namely, those texts and contributions that either directly influenced or otherwise illuminate important elements of it. Spiritual experience, I will argue, derives its sense from the problematic around which these texts are configured. In the first chapter, I attempt to provide an overview of Adorno's philosophical project as a response to the contemporary conditions of experience, conditions that can be described under the term "disenchantment." My intention is to show how Adorno conceives the goal of philosophy as a recovery of experience, and to clear up some possible misconceptions about what this actually means. The discussion of Wittgenstein, in chapter 2, will clarify the sense of two ideas that are central to spiritual experience. These are (1) the notion of thought as a "process," and (2) a conception of the task of philosophy as that of "saying the unsayable." While I am not claiming that Wittgenstein is a formative influence on Adorno, I am suggesting that major elements of Adorno's understanding of philosophy are made intelligible in their relation to Wittgenstein's early thought. I then proceed to a discussion of Adorno's relation to Walter Benjamin in chapter 3. Benjamin, I will argue, is indispensable for understanding how Adorno develops his idea of philosophical interpretation. The discussion then moves to a more explicit discussion of Adorno's philosophy in terms of the idea of an "outbreak attempt." Spiritual experience, I will suggest, is conceived in the encounter with thinkers whose work Adorno interprets as systematic attempts to "break out" of constituting subjectivity. In the case of Husserl, I argue in chapter 4 that Adorno senses a strong affinity with Husserl's resistance to natural-scientific reductionism (which Adorno takes to be a direct consequence of disenchantment). However, Adorno will argue that Husserl does not think through the presuppositions of constituting subjectivity in a sufficiently radical way, and as a result his outbreak attempts fails. Chapter 5 examines Bergson, whose resistance to the reductivism of scientific rationalism is theorized in terms of the qualitative heterogeneity of *durée*, in opposition to the model of cognition as static classification through the intelligence. The fact that there are no existing treatments of Adorno's relation to Bergson in Adorno scholarship is, I believe, one of the main reasons why the idea of spiritual experience has remained undiscovered. The understanding of conceptual thinking as a form of domination or mastery over the nonconceptual is, I will suggest, an idea that Adorno traces to Bergson (and not Nietzsche). Although Adorno rejects the Bergsonian solution to the constricted cognitive experience in the concept, namely intuition, Bergson is indispensable for understanding the problematic

to which spiritual experience answers. Equally important, I shall suggest, is the recovery of the subject in Marcel Proust's literary project, as this is realized in *À la recherche du temps perdu*. This is the subject of chapter 6. The idea of using the subject to reverse the process of abstraction behind the formation of the constituting subject is, I will argue, realized in a masterful way in Proust's *magnum opus*. The final chapter, chapter 7, on John McDowell's reading of disenchantment in his *Mind and World* is intended to be a test case for the pertinence and critical force of Adorno's idea of spiritual experience. I will argue that, like Husserl's outbreak attempt, McDowell's attempt to reconcile mind and world fails because it does not truly get beyond constituting subjectivity. McDowell's understanding of experience reflects disenchantment, rather than being genuinely able to overcome it. The argument as a whole will therefore comprise a defense of Adorno's claim that the only way successfully to execute the outbreak is as the movement of thought that he calls *Selbstbesinnung*, or "self-awareness."

1

The Consequences of Disenchantment

Disenchantment and Experience

Understanding the critical role that spiritual experience plays in Adorno's philosophy will require coming to grips with his view of the present as characterized by the atrophy of experience. At the root of this idea is a thesis about disenchantment that encompasses both a social history and a critique of modern philosophy in so far as it is unable to reflect critically on that history. Disenchantment is essentially describable in terms of a specific type of distortion within reason produced by a process of rationalization. Kontos describes this quite succinctly.

> The force behind disenchantment is rationality, or, more precisely, rationalization. Rationality, unlike reason, is concerned with means, not ends; it is the human ability to calculate, to effectively reach desired goals. It emanates from purposive practical human activity. It is this-worldly in origin. It has infinite applicability and an extraordinary expansiveness under certain circumstances. Indeed, it can be quite imperial. It transforms what it touches and, finally, it destroys the means-ends nexus. (1994, 230)

What lies behind this, as Weber puts it, is the notion that "one could in principle master everything through *calculation*" (1989, 13). It is important to see here (and it is something I shall continually emphasize) that there is nothing malign in itself about the purposive-practical attitude that is affiliated with

disenchantment. Following from the way that Adorno reads the disenchantment thesis, the distortion that leads to the harmful consequences of disenchantment occurs when the calculative thinking associated with the purposive-practical attitude begins exclusively to usurp the authority to determine when experience can count as cognitively significant. This is when the practical human interest in control over nature takes on the encompassing form of instrumental reason. The disenchantment thesis is therefore guided by a sense that rationalization pushed to the limit has as a consequence the dissolution of the cognitive worth of forms of experience that do not fit the typical means-end schema of calculative thinking. In a passage strongly suggesting the influence of Simmel, Weber himself had made this point in his remark on the feelings of young people about science, namely that it is an "unreal world of artificial abstractions, which with their lean hands seek to capture the blood and sap of real life without ever being able to grasp it" (1989, 15). Something important about experience slips through the fingers of scientific cognition, Weber is suggesting.[1]

What drives disenchantment, as Bernstein has argued, is the "extirpation of what is subjective" (2001, 88). He takes this to be equivalent to the anthropomorphic quality attaching to our everyday empirical concepts, and the way in which they make objects available in terms of their subjective effects. Order is gathered from "how things affect and appear to embodied, sensuous subjects." Bernstein asserts that the extirpation of the subjective is equivalent to what he calls the "self-undermining dialectic of scientific rationalism" (p. 10). While I think this formulation is essentially right, I am going to give it a somewhat different emphasis in what follows.[2] I believe it is entirely right to describe the rationalization process that leads to disenchantment as a form of abstraction. And this abstraction, as Bernstein has demonstrated, is essentially a denial of dependence.[3] However, what I want to suggest is that the rescue of philosophy's dependence is, for Adorno, primarily a move in the cognitive self-reflection of scientific rationalism, rather than an ethical imperative. What I mean by this (and it is a central thesis of this work) is that the revelation of dependence is scientific rationalism's recognition of itself *as* a distorted, constricted form of cognition, and that its being this way is due to nonrational causes (hence its dependence). The recovery of the subjective is the route to the revelation of dependence, but it is not by itself a reconciled reason in waiting. In this sense, my interpretation of Adorno's model of philosophical critique will be resolutely negative. Spiritual experience, I will argue, is the awareness of scientific rationalism about itself in its self-reflection. Or, in other words, it is the revelation of scientific rationalism *as* a form of experience (and this means: as a form of experience premised on the mutilation of experience). Any hints of a reconciled reason that appear within it are nothing but the inverse image of its disclosure of the mutilated character of experience in the present.

To understand Adorno's view of the process of abstraction that underlies disenchantment, it must be borne in mind that this process is at one and the same time the elimination of the cognitive significance of the subjective, *and* the formation of the constituting subject. In fact, for Adorno, these two are one and the same development seen from different points of view. The constituting subject is, obviously, that very understanding of the role of the subject in cognition that receives paradigmatic philosophical articulation in Kant. However we must be aware that for Adorno the Kantian thesis (and its developments in post-Kantian idealism) is a philosophical expression of the historical process of disenchantment.[4] In fact, we could well say that the Kantian thesis concerning the transcendental subject reveals the truth about *what has happened to cognition* in the course of disenchantment. In very general terms, the constituting subject portrays knowledge according to a scheme characterized by a sharp division between the passive or receptive moment of sense, and the active moment of synthesis through the application of concepts.[5] An important feature of this model is that experiential items available to sense are, in themselves, blind.[6] That is to say, they do not "count" in cognitive terms until they have been synthesized, or "constituted" in some way by a subject. The constituting subject establishes as a norm a very particular way in which experiential items are entitled to count as cognitively significant. Those items must be subsumable under rules that articulate them as exemplars of a general class. Particular items, that is to say, are cognitively important in so far as they instantiate a generalizable characteristic or property. There are two fundamentally important claims that Adorno makes about this model of the constituting subject. First, it is *historically true*. The constituting subject captures that type of cognitive engagement with the world that is pervasive in the social practices and institutions of the modern world. Second, what lies behind the constituting subject is a process of *cognitive subtraction*. That is to say, the subject *becomes* the constituting subject through that process in which it learns to eliminate from its cognitive engagement with the world all features that depend on its own role as a situated subjectivity. This is why disenchantment, for Adorno, is describable in terms of the subject's own self-mutilation in the course of its history.[7] Now while it is clear that the type of cognitive engagement with the world made possible through the constituting subject increases the extent of human control over nature, because it is organized primarily in terms of its regularity and predictability, Adorno wants to argue that it comes at the cost of a fateful cognitive deficit. Bringing the subject to an awareness of that cognitive deficit—showing *us* as the inheritors of this history what our own cognitive schemes cannot *say*—is the major task of philosophy as negative dialectic.[8]

The interpretation I have sketched here of Adorno's idea of the constituting subject as formed by the repression of subjectivity does seem to show a

clear debt to the Nietzschean and Freudian accounts of the history of culture. While this debt is most evident in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the basic scheme continues to inform the later writings, including *Negative Dialectic*.[9] However, I want to suggest that Adorno's own formulation of the problem and its philosophical solution does not in fact draw directly on these accounts.[10] The more immediate source for Adorno's understanding of the repression of subjectivity can be found in the works of Husserl and Bergson. In the 1965/1966 lectures on negative dialectic, the notes for a passage addressing the nature of subsumption under concepts as mere "technique" are followed by the phrase, in parentheses, "Bergson knew this" (2003a, 115). It is primarily from the critiques of the neo-Kantian model of cognition as a constriction of experience in this generation of thinkers (primarily, I shall suggest, Bergson, Husserl, and Proust) that Adorno develops his own account of philosophical critique. The notion of culture as repression in the Nietzschean and Freudian accounts survives in this generation of thinkers as a thesis about the stultifying force of everyday schemes for organizing and classifying experience according to the dictates of practical usefulness. Bergson (and subsequently, in literary form, Proust) give this the name of *habitude*.[11] Bergson's account, in *Matter and Memory*, of the origin of general ideas in the habitual reactions preserved in motor memory rewrites the repression thesis as a general account of the operation of the understanding.[12] The emphasis therefore shifts from philosophy of history to the analysis of how to resist, or work against the tendency of the habitual operation of concepts to cut short experience. It is from this generation that Adorno develops his understanding of critical philosophy as an *Ausbruchsversuch* (outbreak attempt), that is, an attempt to "break out" of the experiential confines of constitutive subjectivity. *Negative Dialectic*, the task of which Adorno defines as "to break through the delusion of constitutive subjectivity with the force of the subject" (1966, 10), is the elucidation of this project.

A particular type of abstraction, I suggested, defines the constitutive subject, and it is this abstraction that, Adorno believes, underlies the process of disenchantment. Essentially, the argument concerns the way in which particulars derive their meaning, and it rests on what Adorno takes to be a subtle shift in the operation of concepts. Within this scheme, particulars are meaningful in so far as they exemplify (or instantiate) a property or value that can be repeated over an indefinite number of other particulars. In experience as it is organized by this process of abstraction, what determines the cognitive significance of particulars, whether they are allowed to "count" in cognitive terms, depends on whether they embody a property or value that is detachable from those particulars themselves. In saying that it is "detachable," I mean that this property or value might be realized in any number of other interchangeable particulars. According to this scheme of abstraction, therefore, experiential particulars become (indifferent) means to realize a (cognitive) value. It is

this conception that sets up the layout of experience as seen from the perspective of the constitutive subject: reality as composed of discrete, fungible exemplars.

In describing abstraction in this way, I am of course drawing an explicit parallel with a Marxian account of the abstraction at the heart of exchange value.[13] Like the replacement of use value for exchange value, the organizing of experience through abstraction replaces a purely qualitative with a quantifiable characteristic, where the latter can be instantiated in units that are identical and distinct. Adorno finds this process of abstraction at work, not only in philosophical theories and the social practice of commodity exchange, but also in the products of popular culture. The key idea behind Adorno's critique of the culture industry is that, rather than forming a coherent development, the elements of a product (whether it be a film, piece of music, or whatever) are isolated and then deployed for their ability to engender effects. Their "value," that is to say, now becomes determined as their ability to produce an effect that is repeatable over a series of discrete particulars. Whatever the sphere in question, the upshot of abstraction is that particulars are subordinated to an instrumental logic that constitutes them as means to realize or instantiate a value.

It is important to reiterate here that Adorno is *not* claiming that there is something harmful in itself about the presentation of particulars as possessing repeatable properties. The abstraction in question underlies the harmful effects of disenchantment, but it is not itself identical with it. To understand this, it will be necessary to delve into Adorno's all-important reflections on language. On Adorno's view, the abstraction in question is an indispensable, but dependent, element in the capacity of language to reveal experience as meaningful. But what happens when disenchantment takes hold is that this dependence is reversed. The cognitive value of what is said in language is now entirely determined by the results of the process of abstraction. It is at this point that reason gets reduced to instrumental reason. The part has twisted free, and now stands in judgment on language as a whole. It is precisely this inflation of the process of abstraction to a position of sole authority that Adorno conceives to be the driving force behind our confinement within the constituting subject. Hence it is this process that is responsible for the estrangement of mind and world.[14]

The process of abstraction that Adorno identifies with disenchantment must ultimately be understood in terms of the expressive possibilities of language. Before moving on to this, however, it is worthwhile dwelling for a moment on what this claim about abstraction amounts to. The claim I am making about a shift in how particulars can be conceptualized as cognitively significant is quite close to Cora Diamond's (1988) account of a transformation of philosophical language that results in the reduction of conceptual

description to a certain narrow kind of classification.[15] This, she argues, has resulted in an impoverished understanding of conceptual life. Diamond illustrates this in terms of a contrast between grasping a concept in the sense of "knowing how to group things under that concept," and in the sense of "being able to participate in life-with-the-concept" (1988, 266). Conceptual cognition becomes pure classification (knowing how to group things under a concept) when it is pulled out of the context of human life and interests that gives the word its experiential significance. Diamond uses the concept of a human being to illustrate this difference (1988, 263–66).[16] An understanding of this concept in terms of the "concept of a member of a particular biological species," she suggests, is a classification that is entirely incongruous with the experiential significance of the term. That significance becomes accessible in our experiences of instances where the recognition of another as a human being is granted and where it is withheld. To have the concept of a human being is therefore "to know how thoughts and deeds and happenings, and how happenings are met, give shape to a human story; it is a knowledge of possibilities, their weight and their mysteriousness."[17]

Diamond's discussion points to a transformation (in fact, a distortion) in how experience is conceptualized, or in how experience is able to enter concepts as cognitively significant. Diamond wants to maintain that there is a sense in which we may lack, or struggle to find the words appropriate to an experience, and that this constitutes an impoverishment. It is exactly this sort of distortion that Adorno is pointing to in the transformation of words from "substantial vehicles of meaning" into "signs devoid of quality." Instead of "bringing the object to experience," disenchanted language treats it as the "exemplar of an abstract moment" (1972a, 173 [translation altered]). Elsewhere, Adorno describes this in terms of the extraction of the meanings of concepts from "living language" (1973, 67). What is essential to Adorno's view, however, is that this is not simply a result of a philosophical misunderstanding concerning the cognitive significance of experience; the linguistic or philosophic distortion tracks what Adorno takes to be a transformation of experience within social practices.[18] It is not merely that we are in the grip of a misleading theoretical picture of what experience is. The narrowing of experience in philosophic terms is ultimately intelligible, Adorno believes, in terms of the general *social* inaccessibility of (non-disenchanted) experience. Once the consequences of this thesis are understood, it becomes clear why spiritual experience must be seen as the disenchanted world in its self-reflection. If it is accepted (1) that the meaning of concepts are dependent on "living language" within social practice, and (2) disenchantment is a process that comprises the hollowing out of meaning from social practice, then spiritual experience cannot be understood as replacing disenchanted concepts with substantial, fully meaningful ones. Because those concepts are not socially

available, philosophy cannot simply conjure them into being.[19] The task of philosophy as spiritual experience is to reveal the experiential substance of these hollowed out concepts. This means bringing concepts to express the loss of experience that makes them work *as* disenchanted concepts. Through a certain type of philosophical interpretation (which Adorno will characterize as a "negative" dialectic), it is in fact possible to surmount the reduction of the concept to a narrow kind of classification. But what comes to expression thereby in concepts is the experience of loss. It is, as Adorno puts it, nothing else than suffering raised into the concept.

I will discuss this idea more fully in the analyses to follow,[20] but the general idea is illustrated in exemplary fashion in a passage in Proust. The passage occurs in *Du côté de chez Swann*, where Swann hears the "little phrase" of the music of Vinteuil at the Sainte-Euverte *soirée*. Swann has come to associate this phrase with his love for Odette. What is striking about this passage is the way that Proust's narrator describes the *petite phrase* as recovering an experiential significance that is inaccessible to the abstract language that Swann possesses to talk about this experience. It is through the *petite phrase* that language is revealed in its estrangement from experience. Here is the passage:

> In place of the abstract expressions "the time where I was happy," "the time when I was loved," that [Swann] had often pronounced up until then without suffering too much, because his intelligence had only put into them supposed extracts of the past which conserved nothing of it, he found again all that which had formed the specific and volatile essence of this lost happiness; he saw again the snowy and curled petals of the chrysanthemum that she tossed to him in the carriage, that he held against his lips—the embossed address of the "Maison Dorée" on the letter where he had read "my hand trembles heavily in writing to you" . . . (1999a, 277)

Proust's narrator is here providing an exemplary presentation of the experience of loss. It is something like this experience, I am suggesting, that is the goal of negative dialectic. What characterizes the experience is the distance between language and the experience that searches for expression. Swann does not suffer when he utters the phrases "the time when I was happy," "the time when I was loved," because these phrases are disenchanted: they have become severed from their experiential substance. When, through the *petite phrase* of Vinteuil, Swann is able to recover the experiential substance of these phrases, the result is not the restoration of a fulfilled meaning, but the disclosure of suffering as the experiential substance of disenchanted concepts. Happiness (in the form of Odette's love) is revealed in this experience, but as what is past, thus inaccessible and unsayable in the present. What is essential to the success

of a negative dialectic, I am suggesting, is that it leads concepts to disclose their own dependence on a form of experience that makes it impossible for them to put experience into words. It is simply the concept's self-reflection on its own inadequacy.

LANGUAGE AND EXPRESSION

Adorno is one of a select group of twentieth-century philosophers who sought to show that the systematic narrowing of the possibilities for cognitive experience is, in the modern world, ultimately related to a specific distortion within language. Adorno describes this distortion as the loss of language's expressive element. Other twentieth-century thinkers in this group include Walter Benjamin, Merleau-Ponty, and also, I would argue, Bergson and Proust.[21] All of Adorno's major works are littered with phrases that describe the task of philosophy in precisely these terms: as bringing something to language (*zum Sprechen bringen*), "giving voice" to something (*zum Laut helfen*) or "helping something to expression" (*zum Ausdruck helfen*), or even as the "objectification" (*Objektivation*) of experience. Adorno conceives philosophy as a discourse the goal of which is the recovery of language's expressive element. The overriding importance that Adorno gives to this idea becomes understandable once it is seen that the inflated cognitive role of abstraction, which is what drives disenchantment, is first and foremost a distortion of language and the way that it relates to experience. Within language, this distortion appears in the form of a wholly arbitrary relation between the sign and what is signified. This is an insight that is common to all of the thinkers I mentioned above, and it explains why every one of them sought to challenge the thesis of the wholly arbitrary nature of signification with an idea of language as a form of "translation."[22]

The point in speaking about translation is to capture the sense in which language does not so much constitute or structure experience, but rather reflects or expresses a meaningful order of experience. Adorno's questioning of the arbitrary nature of signification is not attributable to a belief in some sort of magical tie between word and thing.[23] What he is getting at is the potential for the linguistic sign to become laden with the sense of *how* something is experienced, that is, the particular qualities of that experience for a subject. Thus the point at which the sign becomes *entirely* arbitrary (which exists only in hypothesis) would be that stage where the content of a given sign would be completely severed from the meaningfulness of that content *as* experienced by a historically situated subject. Adorno often refers to these two elements as if they were two diverging tendencies of signification. In the lectures on Hegel, Adorno refers to the "expressive" and the "argumentative" or "communicative"

aspects of language that are in tension with one another (1993b, 105, 137).[24] Language is "expressive" to the extent that the contextual meaningfulness of experience for a subject can be transmitted in the words used. When, in his *Antrittsvorlesung* at the University of Frankfurt, Adorno (1971a) lays out a conception of philosophy as "interpretation" (*Deutung*), he is foregrounding the nature of language as expression. What Adorno means by this idea is simply that more is said in a philosophical work than is communicated by its explicit content, and this "more" is none other than the moment of expression that is accessible to interpretation. It is not something "in addition" to that content, but rather (as Adorno will claim) the full, social-historical significance of that content.[25]

In linguistic terms, the purpose of philosophical interpretation is to recover the meanings that attach to the sign understood as an attempt to put into words the experience of a subject in a particular historical context. Interpretation is therefore, for Adorno, a linguistic practice that seeks to reverse the severing of communication from expression, a process that is at the root of the narrowing of cognitively significant experience. This is why Adorno can describe negative dialectic as saving what is "oppressed, disparaged, thrown away" by concepts (1966, 21), or as "healing the wounds" that are the mark of the laceration of experience in the concept (1973, 55). In *Negative Dialectic*, Adorno also describes the goal of interpretation as the recovery of the "rhetorical" moment, that which rescues the element in language where it relates to the thing "other than in a merely signifying way [*anders sich verhält als bloß signifikativ*]" (1966, 65). It is imperative for any attempt to grapple with Adorno's texts that the implications of this philosophical strategy are understood. The most important point stems from Adorno's description of philosophical interpretation as a practice of resistance within language to the tendency of communication to pull free of expression. This means that an Adornian text is more like a process than a set of explicit theses. Or, in other words, the focus is on what the author is able to show *in* the arrangement of specific theses, rather than the explicit communicable content.[26] Adorno understands that process itself to be one involving the constant self-correction of concepts. Any defense of the notorious obscurity of Adorno's style would have to begin with this insight.

The disappearance of the expressive element of language, I suggested, is equivalent to the representation of experiential items as cognitively significant in so far as (as discrete particulars) they function as exemplars of a generalizable value. In the first place, therefore, working against this abstraction must take the form of re-creating, reweaving the webs of significance that link elements to one another as they figure in subjectively saturated experience. Adorno describes this interpretive practice in terms of a "force field." Rather than constituting the experiential item as a discrete and repeatable exemplar,

the subject makes interpretive connections between the experiential item and all the elements surrounding it in its historical context, "attracting" those elements toward it by demonstrating how the positioning of those elements illuminates the intrinsic features of this experiential item. An important aspect of this interpretive practice, Adorno believes, is that it recovers the meaning of the thing as a historically situated item. Robert Witkin has described Adorno's idea of interpretation as a formulation of part-whole relations where the whole structure "develops out of the interactions among its elements" (2002, 7). The type of interpretation in question is in fact crucial to the idea of spiritual experience, because it outlines a way of moving from the particular to the universal in a form that is different from the abstraction process that drives disenchantment. Rather than fixing the particular as the exemplar of a repeatable property, the type of universal that follows from this interpretive practice is simply the fully developed contextual significance of the particular in question. Rather than a detachable property, it is an immanent universal, because it is dependent on the interpretation of the features of the thing in its historical context. Adorno usually expressed this idea in Hegelian terms as mediation. What was most important about this idea, for Adorno, was that it represented a way of connecting elements internally rather than externally. That is to say, what relates the two elements is not to be conceived as a connector, as a separable "third thing" that they both have in common. The elements illuminate one another by the interactions they maintain with each other, rather than figuring as exemplars of a generalizable characteristic. As Adorno liked to put this, mediation exists *in* the thing; it is not a relation *between* things (1974d, 562).

As the self-reflection of classificatory thinking, spiritual experience draws the concept toward an insight into its dependence on a context outside of it. The concept therefore expresses the historical experience that is the condition of possibility of its operation as *this* concept. Adorno is making a similar point in the following important passage in *Negative Dialectic*:

> The object opens itself to a monadological insistence that is the consciousness of the constellation in which it stands: the possibility of immersion in the interior needs what is outside. But such immanent universality of the individual is objective as sedimented history. This is in it and outside of it, something surrounding it, where it has its place. To become aware of the constellation in which the thing stands means to decipher the one that it carries within itself as something that became what it is. (1966, 165)

The "immanent universality" of the individual item to which Adorno refers here involves uncovering the context of social-historical meaning that has

pressed itself into it, making it the kind of item it is. Again, the central idea in this picture is that classification presupposes the work of abstraction, the isolation of the thing from the network of mediations that make it intelligible as an historical item. The goal is not to produce a more exact classification of the object, but to retrace the steps of the extinguishing of contextual meaning that makes the object accessible in the terms of static classification. Hence the sedimented history in the object is the history of what has happened to the object as a result of this process.[27]

The type of interpretive practice that Adorno sees as essential to the recovery of the expressive element of language is nicely illustrated in "Handle, Pitcher, and Early Experience," where Adorno describes his early encounter with Ernst Bloch's *Spirit and Utopia*. The book itself, Adorno claims, constitutes a "singular revolt against the renunciation" that has come to infect thinking (1974d, 557). The first segment of *Spirit of Utopia* puts this into practice in exemplary fashion in the case of an "old pitcher," the "clumsy brown implement, with almost no neck, a wild man's bearded face, and a significant, snail-shaped solar emblem" (Bloch 2000, 8). Adorno's essay focuses on the changed relationship to the object that Bloch manages to put into effect. The subject, in Bloch's description, ceases to be a static, fixed point of observation, as if it were a screen that passively records the imprint of events as they pass by. Adorno speaks of the "shaking to the core [*Erschütterung*] of the relation of the subject to that which it wants to say" (1974d, 562). Significantly, this is not the work of any specific theses articulated by Bloch in his description of the pitcher. It is the form of presentation that achieves the transformed relation to the object. In particular, Adorno lays stress on the tempo of the text, which seems to cross in rapid succession between concrete description and the heights of philosophical speculation. Bloch interrogates the object from many different directions, adopting the visual perspective of a moving camera. The social history that has impressed itself into the object, leaving its traces on the lines and crevices on its surface, is now brought to life, spiritualized by the animated but fully controlled immersion in the object that is the key to Bloch's interpretive practice. The point about it being a controlled process, one that exhibits an "unyielding theoretical force," situates it firmly within the rational concept. But it is the manner in which the concept is put to work to illuminate the object from many different angles, treating its features as the emblems of living relations, that is the focus of Adorno's interest. The pitcher becomes intelligible only out of the reading of what these relations have made of it. Hence tracing the threads of significance out towards its context is the same as the route to the very interior of the pitcher. Exactly as a musical theme is understood through the different contexts in which it becomes embedded in the work as a whole. The central point becomes apparent in this passage:

> In Hegelian fashion, Bloch's experience carries the content along with it. What counts for him as beautiful are no longer the relations of proportion of his pitcher, but that which, as its becoming and history, has conserved itself in it, what disappeared in it, what the gaze of the thinker, as tender as it is aggressive, brings to life. (1974d, 563)

Bloch finds a way to penetrate the solidified exterior of the object through a form of controlled immersion. To refer to this as tender/aggressive means that it brings to bear in equal measure the desire to identify with the object and the demand that the object conform to the dictates of a rational articulation of its meaning. The desire to identify with the object is the same as the striving to make language work expressively, by trying to capture the richness of the subject's situated experience of the object in language. At the same time, the "aggressive" component of interpretation forces the expressive element to articulate itself in conceptual structures, giving a rational and communicable form to its desire to identify with the object. The dependence of expression on the moment of rational articulation is the reason why Adorno claims that it is only the unyielding theoretical force that can truly yield to the object (1974d, 561).

It is the same practice of controlled immersion that Adorno finds at work in Proust.[28] It works by way of the rational articulation of experience in concepts, but as the transformation of concepts in the course of the striving to identify with the object. What is essential to spiritual experience, Adorno claims, is an idea of the activity of the subject as playing a more substantial role in cognition than the constituting subject (1966, 189). Whereas, on the latter view, the activity of the subject becomes a kind of "automatism," Adorno calls for a type of interpretive practice in which the experiencing subject attempts to "disappear" in the object (1966, 190). Spiritual experience does not step outside the concept, but uses the claim to know the object implicit in conceptual classification against that cognition itself. Adorno describes this process as a "rational process of correction against rationality" (1973, 87). The disappearance or immersion in the object drives the subject to correct its identification of the object in terms of static and general properties. Spiritual experience is nothing else than the way in which the concept illuminates the object in its self-corrective course. At no point does negative dialectic reach down outside the concept, but its movement expresses a truth about the object that is not present as a conceptual content. To use Wittgensteinian terms, it "shows" something about the object that cannot be directly said within the concept.[29]

SELBSTBESINNUNG (SELF-AWARENESS)

It is this potential for language to show something that cannot be directly said with concepts that determines Adorno's philosophical writing as more like a

process rather than the ordering of a set of theses. The most important thing, as Adorno puts it, is "what takes place within it [*was in ihr sich zuträgt*]," not a specific thesis or position (1966, 44). The claim that I will develop fully in later chapters of this work is that the model of philosophical interpretation developed by Adorno leads to a conception of philosophy as the practice of a type of critical self-reflection; Adorno calls this *Selbstbesinnung*, or "self-awareness."[30] The essential component of this interpretive practice is the recovery of the expressive element of language. Getting a grip on how *Selbstbesinnung* works will require a fuller explication of this connection.

Selbstbesinnung is, in the simplest terms, philosophy's awareness of its own dependence.[31] It is the process in which philosophy brings to expression the historical experience that is the condition of possibility of its concepts. The claim, to be clear, is not that philosophical concepts are *caused* by specific historical conditions (this, of course, would be the type of reductivist sociology of knowledge that Adorno continually opposed). It concerns rather the exhaustive cognitive significance of the concept, recovered in opposition to its role as a subsuming or classifying device under the authority of the constituting subject. Concepts are not *causally* constituted by a particular structure of historical experience. Rather, Adorno's claim is that they express that experience. Adorno puts this point about the cognitive-expressive potential of concepts in terms of the need to bring back concepts "into the spiritual experience that motivates them" (1993b, 139 [translation altered]). This is why, for Adorno, philosophical truth exceeds authorial intention.[32] The way to understand this claim is as asserting that what concepts express in language exceeds what they say when they are *put to use* as concepts that synthesize experience.

In the Greater Logic, Hegel differentiates the elucidation of concepts in (speculative) logic from the everyday operation of concepts as tools of the understanding. In life, Hegel suggests, "the categories are *used*" (1969, 24). This use or employment of the categories is "unconscious" in that it does not concern itself with the meaning of concepts *as* concepts. Hegel identifies two functions of concepts as items of use. First, they serve as "abbreviations" for a collection of particulars; second, they serve the exact determination of what Hegel calls "objective relations," where concepts are applied to a content perceived as simply given. In contrast to this role of concepts as classifying devices, speculative logic, which Hegel characterizes as "self-knowing," is the self-articulation of concepts in their truth (1969, 27). What Hegel means by this is, quite simply, the elucidation of what concepts mean in and through language. Speculative logic is simply *logos*, the interpretation of what language reveals about concepts.[33] It is something very similar to this idea that Adorno has in mind with the translation of concepts into spiritual experience. Adorno refers to this as the attempt to "bring logic to language" or to make it speak (*zum Sprechen zu bringen*) which is the opposite of the process in which language is "translated into

logic" (1970a, 47). However, there is of course a decisive difference from Hegel in that, for Adorno, its dialectical interpretation dissolves the concept into historical experience, bringing to awareness the dependence of the concept on what cannot be assimilated within its categories as a conceptual concept.

It is important to clarify this last point, as it will help to guard against a misunderstanding of what Adorno means by the dependence of the concept on the "nonconceptual." The nonconceptual does not refer to a property, nor is it another part of the thing (as, for example, the scent or the silken quality of the rose is another property opposed to, say, its redness). As Rolf Tiedemann has pointed out, the nonconceptual is not something "already given" and as something ready to hand (1993, 100). It is instead solely attainable in the unfolding of the social, historical and human significance of an experiential item. The essential idea is that the object is to be understood as a site that accumulates meanings in its movement through historical time.[34] Those meanings are not accessible in it as though they were static properties. Hence one cannot look for them as one might look for a watermark on a bank note. They are rather the features of the thing as reflected through its relationship to its social and temporal context, features that require the concrete elucidation of the way they are subjectively experienced in order to be brought to the surface. In order to be present before the subject as a static (detemporalized) thing with fixed properties, the thing must already have been subjected to the logic of disenchantment.[35] The reason, therefore, that the nonconceptual cannot be assimilated as a conceptual content, the reason that Adorno will refer to it as a "blind spot" in cognition, is that it encapsulates those experiential meanings that had to be subtracted in the restriction of cognitive experience under the sway of the constituting subject. It is nothing less than the experiential conditions of philosophical concepts and, as such, the disclosure of their full historical truth. To be able to disclose that experience, philosophy has to take the form of a process that *shows* that dependence through the articulation of what concepts say.

This is where the notion of philosophy's dependence links up directly with the project of negative dialectic as a form of critical self-reflection. The recognition of dependence is the moment when concepts are brought to self-awareness about the way that they are structured under the conditions of disenchantment.[36] In calling this *Selbstbesinnung* or self-awareness, Adorno is emphasizing the point that it is an awareness reached *through* the interpretation of concepts, as the point where they reveal their own experiential conditions *in* what they say. Adorno describes this as a "second Copernican turn" that reverses the process of abstraction at the root of constituting subjectivity (1969, 155). The awareness of dependence is therefore equivalent to the full, unreduced experience of the concept. The concept is treated as an experiential surface that, in interpretation, expands outward to reveal the points of contact between its own innermost structure and historical experience.

Adorno's claim that the "outbreak" from constituting subjectivity must be executed with the power of the subject presupposes that the route to the truth about the world's structure goes through the subject. But this requires, *contra* the presupposition of constituting subjectivity, that "the key position of the subject in cognition is experience, not form" (1969, 162). What makes this possible is, first, the realization that the notion of experience as it appears within the constituting subject is itself the result of a prior series of interactions that prestructures the subject's cognitive relation to the world. The appearance of the object as a blind particular is mediated by those interactions. This is what Adorno means when he claims that the subject is "also object, only in its objectification into the moment of form does it forget how and whereby it is itself constituted" (p. 163).[37] For Adorno, this "forgetting" is not restricted to idealist philosophies, it occurs to an extent in all representations of cognition that are organized according to a separation of form from content, and where the relation between those two elements is conceived along the lines of Kantian determinate judgment. It is in the separation of form from content, Adorno believes, that the pre-preparation of experience as the synthesis of blind particulars finds its way into philosophical representations of cognition. The role of the subject as the experiential (*not* constituting) moment in cognition is supposed to recall the diminishing of experience that had to take place in order for the subject to install itself as the forming moment in the cognitive encounter. It works backward to the historical experience that is the historical condition of possibility of this relation.

Natural History and Suffering

Spiritual experience, I have argued, is the transformation of our concepts into the experiential substance that motivates them. Since our concepts operate according to the type of abstraction that defines the constituting subject, Adorno will argue, that experiential substance is characterized in terms of suffering. Adorno's understanding of the idea of natural history is central to his understanding of how concepts can be made to work as the expression of suffering. Natural history works in two directions at once. It follows the Hegelian (Lukácsian) dissolution of reification in the transformation of rigidified forms into historical processes. But at the same time, it resolves that process back into the "suffering" of the items that become prey to the logic of disenchantment. Again, we can see that Adorno's dialectic insists on being relentlessly negative. Spiritual experience is the disclosure of suffering as the truth about experience (that is, as the truth about the "nonspiritual" experience that is the staple of our everyday cognitive activity). This is what Adorno means when he refers to negative dialectic as the "pain of the world raised to a concept" (1966,

18). It is the "mindfulness of suffering" that became sedimented in the concept, the violence wrought on the object through disenchantment (1970a, 43). The concept does not grasp suffering as a conceptual content. It is not accessible as another isolable fact on the surface of experience. The concept *expresses* suffering: it is already at work in the mechanism that dirempts subject and object as form and content. Thus it would be better to say that suffering is a consequence of the very structure of the concept, yet not something that is directly sayable (because not another conceptualizable content) within it. This is why philosophy must take the form of the "expression of suffering," the attempt to "bring the suffering of the world to language" (2003a, 158). The idea of natural history allows Adorno to read the process of formation of the object as a result of its disfigurement at the hands of the universal. Negative dialectic resists the reconciliation in the unity of the concept by using the concept to express the violence done to the particular at the hands of the whole. It makes visible the suffering behind the coercive unification of particulars. A similar insight lies behind all of Adorno's writings on art, music, and sociology. Hence Adorno's claim that "authentic suffering" has implanted "scars" in the work of art that give the lie to the work's autonomy, and refute the reconciliation of universal and particular in the work (2003c, 39). Natural history makes the historical process accessible as an experience. The diremption of subject and object that drives that process becomes visible as the face of suffering worn by the things that are subject to it.

'The need to give voice to suffering," Adorno states in *Negative Dialectic*, "is the condition of all truth" (1966, 29). It is important to take this assertion seriously, since it is central to the critical task of Adorno's conception of negative dialectic as the striving for *Selbstbesinnung* or self-awareness. Suffering is not a fact that exists independently of the subject, but neither is it to be dismissed (*contra* Adorno's detractors) as the private preoccupation of a melancholy subjectivity. Adorno's assertion that suffering is a *condition* of truth, I suggest, must be understood as claiming that truth appears as the inverted reflection of the disclosure of the distortions of the present in critical self-reflection. As Adorno puts this in *Minima Moralia*, the "light of redemption" appears only in its revelation of the present as alienated, with its "cracks and crevices" fully disclosed (1951, 333–34). To state this in more secular terms: Adorno is saying that the revelation of the present as not fully rational is what opens up a distance between our concepts and an unconstrained, unmutilated knowledge of the thing. We can think of the idea of giving voice to suffering in terms of a destruction of the illusory, ideological claim of unity of thought and thing. The claim of such a unity is ideological, Adorno believes, because it stipulates that the subject is able to reconcile its experience with the conventions of language (i.e., language as under the sway of disenchantment and its pulling away from expression). It assumes, that is, that the subject is able to

use linguistic conventions so as to express itself fully within them. Again, it is important to bear in mind that Adorno is not just criticizing the excesses of idealism and its attempts to derive the object from out of the subject. He is claiming that this illusory unity is projected in any structure that reduces the subject to the moment of form, as representing things in terms of repeatable properties. Any model of knowing that embodies the reduction of the subject to subsumptive form (rather than historically situated experience) will recapitulate this illusory unity. The ideological assertion of identity implies that things have no possibilities or tendencies, visible through their historical situatedness, that point beyond their appearance in the present. The destruction of the illusory unity of thought and being, or language and world, is what leads to suffering because it discloses the present and its language in the form of a ruin.[38] It is the *distance* between language and world, which finds expression in the failure of language to say what it must try to say.[39] Thus the disclosure of suffering and the maintaining of truth as transcending the present are one and the same. It is this same destruction of an illusory unity between convention and the expressive subject that Adorno finds compelling about Beethoven's "late" style. Here too, art is closest to truth in the moment where it brings to the surface the failure of reconciliation of the subject and the forms in which it finds its expression. Thus for both art and philosophy, their worth as reflective practices will be determined by whether they are able to reveal as illusory the identification of the present with "truth," and in the process, express the present in the form of suffering through its distance from what would be a reconciled or true world. Adorno undoubtedly came to the idea of natural history through a reading of Walter Benjamin's *Origin of the German Mourning Play*. Benjamin's description of the allegorical perspective as the exposition of history as the "passion (*Leidensgeschichte*, literally: the history of suffering) of the world" would have an important influence on Adorno's interpretive strategy (1974b, 343).[40]

Minima Moralia is an exemplary demonstration of how this interpretive practice is supposed to work. *Minima Moralia* manages to express the disfigurement of the object through tracing on its surface its entwinement with a universal that is under the spell of blind nature. It tells the story of the World Spirit from the perspective of the individual that (as Adorno puts it in his meditations on the *Weltgeist*) has been "buried underneath the universal" (1966, 312). The private sphere, the alienated condition that is all that remains of the realm of the particular vis-à-vis the universal, becomes the object of an interpretation that intends to bring the to the surface "the objective powers that determine the individual existence even in its most hidden interior" (1951, 7). If Hegel had "transfigured the totality of suffering in history into the positivity of the self-realizing absolute," *Minima Moralia* uncovers from the perspective of the individual that the teleological truth of *Weltgeist* would

be "absolute suffering" (1966, 314). This is achieved by registering the disintegration of the individual in late capitalism in the form of spiritual experience. The individual, in the "age of its disintegration," becomes visible through the interpretation of the micro-transformations of private life (1951, 11). The consequences of the "dying of experience" (1951, 43) are read off the surface of the thing as their contextual meaning, ascending to the general truth about society by treating each thing as a reflection of the whole.

> Cognition can be extended only where it remains with the individual such that, through its persistence, the individual's isolation disintegrates. That certainly presupposes a relation to the universal, but not that of subsumption, but rather almost its opposite. Dialectical mediation is not the recourse to what is more abstract, but rather the process of dissolution of the concrete in itself. (1951, 90–91)

The nonsubsumptive relation to the universal that is at work in *Minima Moralia* is precisely the revelation of the universal as the context that is read off the features of the particular. It disintegrates or "dissolves" the particular by showing its dependence on that context, as the narrative of its particularity. This is spiritual experience, but it is far removed from a Hegelian spiritualization of the world. Spiritual experience in Adorno works within the interpretive frame of natural history. Thus what becomes accessible in spiritual experience is the truth about the historical process as the withering of experience (1951, 64). This is visible in *Minima Moralia* as the decay of the individual—its "passing away" as the transition of history into nature. The suffering of the individual gives the lie to the teleology of the self-realizing absolute.

THE LIMITS OF LANGUAGE OR HOW IS SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE POSSIBLE?

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the philosopher Wilhelm Windelband spoke of a "renewal" of Hegel in philosophical circles (1911, 265). Windelband attributed this to the dissatisfaction of a new generation with "positivistic impoverishment and materialistic desolation," that is to say, the scientism and formalism of the dominant neo-Kantian model of philosophy. The efforts of nineteenth-century positivism to model philosophy on the natural sciences had been accompanied by a growing specialization of philosophy as a separate *Fachdiziplin*. At the turn of the century, as Windelband tells it, this new scientific respectability of philosophy had been achieved at the cost of a loss of philosophy's ability to address the pressing spiritual questions of a new generation. What typifies this generation, Windelband suggests, is a

"hunger" for a worldview or *Weltanschauung* that has "gripped our younger generation and which finds its satisfaction in Hegel."

As Rüdiger Bubner has argued, the twentieth century began with an enthusiastic sense of new beginnings in many fields of intellectual life, including philosophy (1981, 11). There was a pervasive sense of the need to distance thought from the previous age. To the new generation of which Windelband speaks, it appeared as though the concerted attempted to disengage the subject from the process of cognition had created a rift between subject and world, effectively confining the role of subjectivity to that of passively registering a process in which it plays no part.[41] Hegel had described this situation as one of diremption—*Entzweiung* (1970, 20).[42] Hegel takes diremption to be a result of the general social and cultural consequences of the dominance of the understanding, which severs "reason and sensuousness, intelligence and nature" and "absolute subjectivity and absolute objectivity" (p. 21). The "need for philosophy," Hegel claims, arises when the "power of unification" has vanished from life, and the oppositions have lost their "living relation and reciprocal action" (p. 22). In the social theory of Georg Simmel, around the beginning of the twentieth century, this experience of diremption is registered as the growing cleavage between the contents of objective culture, and the possibility of interiorizing these contents in the subjective life of the individual. Simmel refers to a "paradox" of culture, which consists in the fact that "subjective life" can become truly cultivated only through "forms which have become completely alien and crystallized into self-sufficient independence" (1968, 30). The subject, Simmel claims, no longer recognizes itself in these forms, hence they are encountered as self-standing creations driven by their own imperatives, divorced from the life of the subject.

Simmel's social theory had an important influence on Georg Lukács, whose theory of the structure of reification in capitalism in *History and Class Consciousness* (published in 1923) had a formative effect on "first generation" critical theorists, including Adorno. In this work, Lukács argues that the cognitive limitations of Kantian philosophy derive from the way that, within it, knowledge is structured as "contemplation." When things become accessible solely in "contemplation," objects become amenable to purely quantitative and formal forms of categorization. This rational objectification, Lukács claims, "conceals above all the immediate—qualitative and material—character of things as things" (1971, 92). The "original and authentic substantiality" of things is shrouded by the ghostly objectivity of the commodity. Lukács's description of this "authentic substantiality" evinces a large debt to the critique of the intellect in Bergson and Simmel. Lukács speaks of the loss of the "qualitative, variable, flowing nature" of time (p. 93), and the dismantling of the "organically unified process of work and life" (p. 103). Lukács famously refers to that point of view from which contemplation is overcome as the standpoint

of praxis. Praxis does not represent action or practice as opposed to theory; it is rather the self-consciousness of the historical process. The proletariat, Lukács wants to claim, recognizes itself as the *subject* of history, which through its practical activity produces commodified objects.

Simplifying somewhat, it is possible to say that there are two central features of the Lukácsian, Hegelian-Marxist solution to reification that render it unpalatable to Adorno. By positing the "identical subject-object" of history as the key to overcoming reification, Lukács both (1) identifies reification with objectification, and (2) adopts a standard teleological conception of history, the "road along which the dialectic of history is objectively impelled" toward self-consciousness (1971, 197). It is the idealist implications of both of these assumptions that would make Lukács's solution unacceptable to Adorno. With regard to the first point, Adorno believes that this assumption is simply a replication of the same pathology that drives disenchantment. It intensifies rather than resolves the blindness of the constituting subject that, for Adorno, is the origin of the structure of contemplation in the first place. Adorno believes that the Lukácsian solution to reification does not get beyond the idealist version of the constituting subject because it understands self-reflection as the unification of subject and object from the standpoint of history. It therefore repeats the idealist error of assuming that the self-reflection of reification is immediately its elimination. This is why Adorno claims that reconciliation would look more like the "communication of what is differentiated" than the "undifferentiated unity of subject and object" (1969, 153). Reification, therefore, must be resisted without bringing about the collapse into the unity of subjectivity typical of the idealist solution. As for the second point, one of the main intentions of the idea of natural history is to resist the teleological reading of history.

What makes Adorno's own critique of the reduced, neo-Kantian conception of cognitive experience different from those of Lukács, Bergson, and others, is that it consistently refuses the temptation to present what exceeds that conception as an accessible standpoint. When thought succumbs to that temptation (as, Adorno believes, happens in Lukács's invocation of praxis, and Bergsonian intuition as a standpoint accessible outside the concept) it risks either (1) collapsing into a form of irrationalism that postulates a deeper thought that is beyond the capacity of rational thought to grasp, or (2) attempting to make that standpoint accessible *within* the concepts of reduced experience, which, if successful, would only confirm that there *is* nothing beyond the capacity of our concepts to grasp after all. Adorno saw that the only way out of this oscillation between irrationalism, and a reduction to what is already known, lay in a rigorous, immanent critique of our concepts. For Adorno, this meant an immanent critique that would delimit, from the inside as it were, the structure of experience as it is circumscribed by our conceptual language.

Adorno is emphasizing the deeply Kantian nature of this enterprise when he states that, as for Kant, philosophy today must consist in the "critique of reason through reason itself, not its banishment or abolition" (1966, 92). Although Kant wants to establish what he takes to be the legitimate bounds of our use of concepts, their confinement to experience, he also argues in the first Critique that we are driven by something like an intrinsic requirement of our thinking to try to transgress these limits, to apply our concepts independently of the conditions of experience. It is impossible for us to know what would be beyond the conditions of experience, yet we inescapably try to grasp it. Like Kant, Adorno will argue that it is impossible for us to grasp with concepts what it is that exceeds the limits of the structure of experience (as it is constituted by our concepts). However, he will also argue that it is possible for us to experience those limits *as* limits. For Adorno, the essential idea behind the Kantian critique of reason can be phrased as "how we can experience the failure of our concepts to express experience?" Adorno argues that the Kantian "block," the claim that it is impossible for us to know things in themselves, as they are outside of our experience, is an experience of this kind. This experience that there is something we want to say, something we wish to express but which cannot be said with our concepts, is what philosophy as negative dialectic strives continually to reproduce. For Adorno, this is in fact equivalent to the very idea of "critical" thought, and this becomes clear if we reflect on the two errors noted above. If it is claimed that we can in fact think of a dimension of experience beyond the limits of our concepts, either that dimension is incommensurable with concepts (in which case we can *say* nothing about it), or, if it can be stated, then, once again, it is integrated into conceptual experience. In neither case is there the potential for a critique of our conceptual experience. That critique, Adorno believes, must take the form of an immanent demonstration of the failure of our concepts, the disclosure of the excess of what strives for expression over what concepts are able to say.

It is precisely these moments, experiences of the failure of concepts, I suggest, that Adorno is attempting to describe with the term "spiritual experience." It is not intended to denote the availability of a perspective on things that would be beyond concepts. It is rather the moment when we become aware of the need for a transfiguration of our concepts, when, that is, such a transfiguration is demanded by the need to give voice to experience. Adorno interprets Kant's notion of a subjective necessity of our thinking to transgress its limits, as a "longing" (he talks of a *Sehnsucht*) that is inseparable from how we use concepts. In a concise summary of what negative dialectic sets out to achieve, Adorno argues that "in the accusation that the concept is not identical to the thing, there lives also the longing of the concept, that it would like to be so" (1966, 152). We must understand this comment as follows: the revelation of the insufficiency of our concepts in relation to experience, the excess

of what we want to say over what they bring to language, is made possible by a longing *intrinsic to the concept*, by its yearning to put experience into words. This is why Adorno claims that "no concept would be thinkable, none would be possible without the more which makes language into language" (p. 112). The "more" that Adorno refers to here is the excess of what calls for expression over what is sayable. To become aware of that "more" in using a concept, Adorno wants to say, is to be aware of the distance that separates *our* experience from the experience prefigured in the longing that animates thinking. By experiencing the failure of our concepts in this way, we can measure the distance between current experience and a nonreduced experienced. And the process of measuring that distance would be equivalent to raising suffering into the concept.

It is also possible to think of this longing, or what Adorno sometimes calls a "striving" (*Anstrengung*) intrinsic to thinking as being evoked in Adorno's use of the notion of "mimesis." Adorno tends to describe mimesis in a way that contrasts it with conceptual cognition. It is said to represent an archaic mode of likening oneself to an object in order to know it, as opposed to subsuming it under concepts, that is, establishing that object as a possessor of qualities that it shares with other things. However, Adorno does not mean to suggest that mimesis constitutes a wholly separate method for knowing experience. If it were that, of course, then it would be another example of the irrationalist position that Adorno consistently refuses. This is why Adorno describes it as something that inhabits our conceptual ways of knowing, almost as a demand on our concepts to measure themselves by what in the object searches for expression. I take it that this is the point of Adorno's claim that the "groping [or grasping—*Tasten*] for that concordance," the affinity of knower and known, "lives on" in the "conception of rational cognition" (1966, 55). If this moment were "wholly extirpated," Adorno goes on to say, then the very possibility that the subject could know the object would be "unintelligible." Rather than a separate type of knowing, then, mimesis is to be understood as something like a demand, raised (perpetually) within the concept, and which pushes it to measure what it says against what in the object wants to be expressed. Thus when Adorno claims that "the mimetic moment blends in with the rational in the course of its secularization," I take it he is referring to its transformation into a call for our concepts to render themselves open to possibilities of experience that exceed what our concepts are currently able to say. What matters in living up to this demand, Adorno believes, has to do with how we use concepts. And this means using language in such a way that one can coax concepts to express the "more" that they say *as* concepts. In the next two chapters, I want to explore this idea of how concepts can express more than they say as concepts in considerably more depth.

2

Saying the Unsayable

> Something obscure that is exactly expressed as such has nothing in common with something clear that is obscurely expressed; the first is like . . . a thunderbolt, the second signifies incompetence. The first is the adequate precision of what is to be said and what can be said (*des Auszusagenden und Aussagbaren*), it is a fully factual refinement . . . the second is dilettant-like and bombast.
>
> —Ernst Bloch, *zu Subjekt und Objekt*

Language and Disenchantment

There are almost certainly no philosophers of the twentieth century who rival Adorno and Ludwig Wittgenstein in terms of the depth of their self-reflection on questions of philosophical language and style. It is somewhat surprising, in light of this fact, that fruitful comparisons between Adorno and Wittgenstein have only begun to be developed within the last twenty years. Albrecht Wellmer sought to express this commonality in terms of an "obsession with the problem of representation" stemming from the felt need to redefine philosophical propositions beyond science and literature (1998, 243). Wellmer suggests that it this concern with representation that is expressed both in Wittgenstein's reference to the battle against the "bewitchment" of intelligence by means of language, and Adorno's assertion in *Negative Dialectic* that philosophy must strive to transcend the concept by way of the concept (p. 242). Like Wellmer, Rolf Wiggershaus (2000) focuses on stylistic similarities as the point of entry to his comparison between these two thinkers. Wiggershaus suggests that

Adorno and Wittgenstein share a conception of philosophy as a reflective life practice, rather than a specialist science. Attention to the process of concept formation in natural language, Wiggershaus argues, denotes a constant readiness for self-reflection, an attention to the world and one's own judgments (2000, 12). The effort to demystify language by returning to the social practices of linguistic usage can be plausibly read as a critique of what Christoph Demmerling (1994) has called linguistic reification. Of course, to articulate the comparison in these terms signals that the focus has usually been on Wittgenstein's later work, often exclusively the *Philosophical Investigations*. While these researches have unearthed valuable insights into both thinkers, shared concerns with the rootedness of language in life, and the distortions that occur when language is severed from practical contexts, they have also obscured the deeper differences between them. What is more, it is through an appreciation of these differences that we will be able to reach right down into both thinkers' most fundamental conceptions of the nature of the philosophical enterprise. This will shed important light on the nature of Adorno's philosophical project.

At key points in his elucidation of his own philosophical perspective, Adorno returns to what he takes to be the fundamental distinction between his conception of philosophy as a form of negative dialectic, and the conception that he associates with Wittgenstein. In *Negative Dialectic*, after a discussion of the failed attempts of Husserl and Bergson to escape from the classificatory concept, Adorno states,

> Against [Husserl and Bergson], what must be insisted on is what occurs to them in vain; *contra* Wittgenstein, to say what will not let itself be said [*was nicht sich sagen läßt*]. The simple contradiction of this demand is that of philosophy itself; the contradiction qualifies it as dialectic even before it gets caught up in its individual contradictions. The work of philosophical self-reflection consists in the articulation of that paradox. (1966, 21)

Adorno is referring to Wittgenstein's comment in the *Tractatus* that "what lets itself be said at all, lets itself be said clearly; and that whereof one cannot speak, thereof must one be silent" (1989a, 2).[1] What is striking about Adorno's formulation (which it will be necessary to explore in depth in due course) is the way he appears to straightforwardly embrace this paradox. To put this difference in a provisional form here: whereas Wittgenstein appears to want to guard against philosophy getting entangled in its urge to say what the philosophical impulse impels it to say, Adorno seems to be suggesting that it is precisely there, when philosophy gets entangled, ensnared in its own contradictions, that all the important work of philosophical insight happens. It was clear to Adorno, at least, that this was not a trivial difference of style, but sig-

naled a deep disagreement about the essence of philosophy. In his 1962 lectures on philosophical terminology, Adorno goes so far as to say that Wittgenstein's statement that "one should only say what lets itself be said clearly" is, from a spiritual (*geistig*) point of view, one of "indescribable vulgarity," because it neglects "that which alone is of concern to philosophy" (1973, 56). The striving to say the unsayable is the very essence of philosophy and at the same time also (precisely because it *is* unsayable) impossible. But why should the striving to say it (if indeed this striving cannot accomplish its aim) be so important? The worry that Adorno's view seems to raise is one that was posed in exemplary fashion by Jürgen Habermas. Adorno, Habermas complains, does not want "to get out of his aporia" (1984, 384). Instead, he appears content to hold on to the notion of a philosophy that could reach the idea of reconciliation, while placing this idea firmly, and perpetually, outside the reach of the philosophical concept. Consequently, Habermas concludes, Adorno's negative dialectic becomes little more than "an exercise, a drill"; philosophical thinking regresses to a form of gesticulation: a futile pointing at what forever eludes its grasp (p. 385).

Habermas's criticism reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of Adorno's philosophy. What matters, for Adorno as for Wittgenstein, is that philosophical writing affects a form of self-reflection that transforms how we relate to our world through the language we use. The aim, as James Conant has put it, is a "process of discovery" (1992, 195).[2] The reader is supposed to become aware of something that was hidden, or perhaps disguised by our ordinary ways of representing what our thinking consists in. What Adorno is doing looks to Habermas like a failed attempt to "say" something (or at least a resignation to the necessary failure of all such attempts), to render what is to be said accessible to analysis. But what if something significant were revealed about ourselves—about our language and our world, perhaps—in the very failure of an attempt to say what one wanted to say? Habermas overlooks this possibility because he misses the way Adorno's writing is intended to function as a form of critical self-reflection that transforms our understanding of our concepts. Rather than, like Habermas, giving us *another set of concepts* that are intended as a normative yardstick with which to measure our existing concepts, Adorno, more radically, wants to transform our habitual understanding of the way our concepts work.[3] What matters for Adorno is what is revealed about our concepts in the very process of trying (and failing) to say something; this is where philosophy reaches that level of critical self-reflection that Adorno terms *Selbstbesinnung* (self-awareness). This only looks self-defeating if one assumes, as Habermas does, that philosophical insight can consist solely in the effort to expound the propositional content of concepts. I am suggesting that there is another, even a more profound, form of philosophical insight that transforms our understanding of our conceptual language as a whole. The

sort of demands this kind of project makes on philosophical writing (and reading) are readily apparent from the tortured style of those (such as Wittgenstein and Adorno) who have attempted it. What is required is a form of writing that is able to use concepts to reveal something that is obscured by our ordinary employment of those concepts to say the things we typically say with them.

It is precisely this distinction between what we say, and what we reveal through what we say, that Wittgenstein intends to capture in the comment, at the very end of the *Tractatus*, that its sentences are like a ladder that is to be "thrown away" after one has used it to make the ascent (1989a, §6.54). Whoever reads them, Wittgenstein asserts, must "overcome these sentences, then he sees the world aright." Philosophy, Wittgenstein asserts, "is not a doctrine, but rather an activity" (§4.112). It is tempting to compare this passage with Adorno's assertion that what is important in philosophy is "what takes place within it, not a thesis or position" (1966, 44). This is why he claims that philosophy cannot be summarized. The attempt to condense a philosophy into a set of detachable theses extinguishes the work of the painstaking ascent toward self-awareness that is the very point of philosophical writing. What matters, for both thinkers, is that we achieve an insight that transforms how we relate to our concepts. This is not a thesis asserted *in* those concepts employed in the philosophical writing (hence Wittgenstein's assertion that they can be safely "thrown away"). It is rather a form of self-reflection that occurs in the process of trying to come to grips with what happens in the course of trying to elucidate a set of theses. Philosophy, so Adorno will claim, achieves an insight about conceptual language as a whole through the self-reflection on its striving to state something.

This evidently raises the question of why Adorno himself did not see the similarity with Wittgenstein's philosophical endeavors. It seems indisputable that the reason for this lay in the fact that Adorno assimilated Wittgenstein through the framework of the logical positivism of the Vienna School, and its demotion of metaphysical statements to the status of meaningless pseudo-statements.[4] A. J. Ayer located the originality of the logical positivists in their "making the impossibility of metaphysics depend not upon the nature of what could be known but upon the nature of what could be said" (1959, 11). The metaphysician is portrayed as one who is breaking the rules by using language in an illegitimate fashion, trying to say something while transgressing the rules of meaningful utterance. It was because he followed the Viennese positivists in assuming that this is what Wittgenstein was up to in the *Tractatus* that Adorno was led to describe Wittgenstein's point of view as embodying an "indescribable vulgarity." It was this interpretation that was disseminated by Rudolf Carnap's well-known reading of the *Tractatus* as circumscribing the bounds of legitimate language use. Whether such a thesis is ultimately inco-

herent is a question I cannot go into here.[5] But it is clear, at least, that Wittgenstein himself forcefully rejected such an interpretation. He wrote in a letter to Mortiz Schlick that Carnap had "completely misunderstood" the last sentences of the book, "and hence the fundamental conception of the entire book."[6] The reference to the "last sentences" as the key to the entire book is important here as it strongly suggests that Wittgenstein intends the *Tractatus* to be understood as an ascent to self-awareness about the status of our language rather than as laying down explicit theses about legitimate and illegitimate language use (which is how Carnap reads it). At the same time that Adorno misreads the strategy of the *Tractatus*, however, he is certainly right that there is something about its view of language and the world that is utterly contrary to the project of a negative dialectic. While the two approaches share a common view of philosophy as the critical self-reflection of concepts, the substance of that self-reflection is in each case radically different.

I suggested that this difference receives expression in the contrast between Adorno's claim that one must work through philosophy's founding contradiction and strive to "say the unsayable," and Wittgenstein's suspicion about the philosophical urge to say what cannot be said. The claim I want to make is that, at the root of this disagreement lie very different responses to the same problem: the drying up of the capacity of language to express meaning under the conditions of the modern disenchantment of the world. To put this fairly schematically here, Wittgenstein's response to this problem in the *Tractatus* is to hold apart sacred contents from possible (in fact, inevitable) corruption through their objectification in language. Wittgenstein uses the term *zufällig* (contingent, or accidental) to capture this instrumental character of what is expressible in language (1989a, §6.41). The attempt to express ethical or religious insights in language transforms an experience where a value binds a subject, *simply because of what is contained in the experience of that value*, into a prescription the validity of which now rests on an instrumental accounting by the subject to whom it is addressed. The attempt to express a value in language splits the quality of the experience from its bindingness for a subject, as the latter now becomes subservient to an instrumental accounting by that same subject. Language, in other words, dirempts subject and object. Wittgenstein puts this as follows

> The first thought with the construction of an ethical law of the form "you ought . . ." is: But if I do not do it, what then? But it is clear that ethics has nothing to do with punishment and fines in the usual sense. Therefore this question about the *consequences* of an action is irrelevant. (§6.422)

The subject's response to an ethical assertion: "But if I do not do it, what then?" registers the estrangement of the subject from the object of experience.

The content of the experience now becomes *zufällig* because it waits on an instrumental accounting by the subject for the judgment of its worth. It is this estrangement that is implicit in language's objectifying force. Hence Wittgenstein's assertion that "sentences can express nothing that is higher" (§6.42). Wittgenstein can be interpreted, or so I shall argue, as attempting to preserve the experience of value from objectification in language by outlining the sphere of the sayable as that of disenchanted contents.

Adorno, in contrast, believes that it is possible to use language to work against the effects of disenchantment. The gamble of Adorno's philosophical writing is that the tendency of language to objectify its contents can be subverted from within. The consequence of disenchantment is an understanding of objectivity in perfectly subject-neutral terms. This process drives a wedge between objectivity, which is now understood in terms of the operation of causal laws that allow for the precise control and exploitation of natural processes, and meaning and value, which are exiled in a self-subsistent subject and now understood as motives and purposes for intervention in the neutral world of objects.[7] A regularly recurring theme in Adorno's philosophical perspective is that disenchantment leads to the impoverishment of both the object of experience, and also the subject. "Experience" becomes simply the passive registering of something taking place "outside" the subject, and this is a direct consequence of the subtraction of the qualitative significance of experience for the subject.

It is important to recognize that Adorno does not take himself to be constructing a metaphysics of history, although that is often what he is (mis)understood to be doing.[8] Adorno takes the philosophical problem of disenchantment—which is indispensable to understanding Adorno's theory of experience—to be rooted in a social process. The bifurcation of subject and object is not intended to be a metanarrative that explains history philosophically. Rather it registers the theoretical and experiential consequences of that form of social modernization generated by capitalism. This thesis is in fact the very opposite of a metaphysics of history, since the result is to place philosophy (together with other cultural practices such as art) firmly *within* the historical process as discourses whose very possibilities of sense-making are dependent on that process. In Adorno's hands, this does not become a reductivist thesis, on the lines of a sociology of knowledge. Instead, it implies a recognition that philosophy (and art) are themselves social practices, not free-floating forms that survey the human world from an ethereal point of time and space. As obvious as this sounds, there is in fact quite a penetrating insight embodied in Adorno's analysis. Adorno believes that the very conception of philosophy as independent of the historical process is itself an effect of reification. Or to put this another way, philosophy is structured as a practice that appears to itself as independent of

social practice. Here, again we return to the issue of self-awareness: how does philosophy achieve self-consciousness about its own status as a dependent form of social practice? What Adorno says about this problem in the context of a discussion of music could equally well apply to philosophy. The point of this passage is to contrast the reductivism of a sociology of knowledge with dialectical critique.

> The dialectical method, and it is precisely the one which is placed squarely upon its feet, cannot simply treat the separate phenomena as illustrations or examples of something in the already firmly established social structure and consequently ignore the kinetic force of a concept. . . . It is rather demanded that the force of the general concept be transformed into the self-development of the concrete object and that it resolve the social enigma of the object with the powers of its own individuation. (Adorno 2003c, 25–26)

The treatment of cultural phenomena as "examples" of social processes, the attempt to explicate their significance by locating their position in the social structure, is for Adorno itself an effect of a disenchanted theory that seeks to classify cultural phenomena while abstracting from its own status as a part of the social process. It cannot account for its own status as a part of the same process that produces cultural phenomena of the sort that it wants to classify. Consequently, this type of theory cannot achieve self-consciousness about its own dependence on social meaning. This is why Adorno makes reference here to the dialectical method as one placed "squarely on its feet," a reference to Marx's critique of Hegel that, as Adorno sees it, became misinterpreted as a scientific theory. The idea of dialectical critique spelled out here, in terms of transforming the "force of the general concept" into the "self-development of the concrete object," is supposed to figure a type of reading that will reveal society at the very interior of a work (musical, philosophical, etc.) itself, through the development of the work's truth content. What distinguishes the two forms of critique is how they relate to the meaning of the work. Whereas disenchanted theory classifies a work while remaining outside its meaning (unmasking the social position of a work by the subject or theme treated, say), dialectical theory wants to demonstrate how social dependence can be excavated from the most exhaustive interpretation of what the work means. The social-historical context is not exterior to the meaning of the work as a governing cause that works, so to speak, behind the scenes. It is rather expressed by the work's meaning.

In the case of philosophical texts and art works, an effect of reification is that such works appear as autonomous, as meaningful "in themselves" independently of the practical contexts in which they are created. Like commodities,

these works give the illusion of creating their own conditions of meaningfulness (or value), as items that are subject to purely intrinsic criteria of sense-making. It is this illusion (or semblance) attached to philosophical language that Adorno is referring to in the important section of *Negative Dialectic* on the "disenchantment of the concept"

> In truth all concepts, even philosophical ones, refer to the nonconceptual, because they are for their part moments of reality that renders their construction necessary—primarily for the purposes of the control of nature. What conceptual mediation appears to be to itself, seen from the inside, the priority of its sphere without which nothing can be known, should not be confused [*verwechselt*] with what it is in itself. The semblance [*Schein*] of being an in itself lends to it the movement that exempts it from the reality to which, for its part, it is fettered. (1966, 23)

As "enchanted," the concept, like the commodity, appears as independent of the social context of its formation. Again, it is important to stress that, for Adorno, this is not simply a "misunderstanding" of the way the concept functions. It is a result of the entwinement of those concepts with certain social conditions; the enchanted concept is, like the commodity, a necessary illusion under conditions of reification. A philosophical work constructed with such concepts will convey the enchanted appearance of an autonomous product, intelligible without reference to the social-historical world of its formation. To change this direction of conceptuality, as Adorno puts it, is the "hinge" of negative dialectic. But now it becomes clear that the problem of presentation, *Darstellung*, is absolutely crucial. Changing the direction of conceptuality is a matter, not of stating a critique of concepts or of proposing alternative concepts (since any such critique will itself be one that employs concepts embodying diremption) but of creating a form of conceptual composition that will disclose the hidden dependence of concepts on conditions external to the work that make those concepts meaningful. As Adorno puts it, "[t]he self-reflection [*Selbstbesinnung*] on its own meaning leads the concept out of the semblance [*Schein*] of its being in itself as a unity of meaning [*Sinn*]" (p. 24). Its dependence on society is therefore revealed immanently, by coaxing the concept to self-consciousness. The essential feature of the form of composition in question is spiritual experience. The point is to use the power of the subject to excavate the hidden dependence of the concept on social meaning, through teasing out of the concept the manifold threads of significance that link it to different features of its historical context. The concept is spiritualized, it is "returned to life" by the dialectical movement that recreates the depen-

dence of its meaning on the life-context of society; this is the concept's "self-reflection."[9]

The disenchantment of the concept, Adorno claims, "is the antidote of philosophy" (1966, 24). There is a striking similarity here to Wittgenstein's claim that "[p]hilosophy is a battle against the bewitchment [*Verhexung*] of our intelligence by means of language" (1953, §109). What Wittgenstein describes as bringing words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use (1953, §116), expresses the same insight into the dependence of philosophical language on social practice that figures in Adorno's account. But there is a significant difference. For Adorno, the disclosure of the dependence of the concept is at the same time the revelation of social experience through the self-reflection (or self-consciousness) of the concept. In other words, its disclosure as a product of reification enables the concept to reveal a truth about social experience that its categories make it incapable of saying. At the same time as it dissolves philosophy's semblance of autonomy, negative dialectic discloses, or "brings to language" the social processes that create the illusion of that autonomy. For Wittgenstein, the self-reflection of the concept does not have disclosive force in this sense. From Adorno's point of view, Wittgenstein's search for the discovery that "gives philosophy peace" (1953, §133) mistakes the symptom for the disease. This is fundamentally a disagreement over what the dependence of philosophy on the nonconceptual really means. For Adorno, it means that the elucidation of philosophical problems will lead *of themselves*, by force of their very meaning, to a disclosure of social processes. But the dependence on social practice exhibited on Wittgenstein's account is purely external: it does not emerge as the disclosure of the truth content of a philosophical concept, it is rather the *dissolution* of any claim to truth content. I shall have more to say about this below, but it will suffice for now to note that there is a striking difference in the account of the source of philosophical problems. For Wittgenstein, these problems are self-subsistent, explicable in terms of *purely* philosophical confusion, in a way that they certainly are not for Adorno.[10] Hence, for Wittgenstein, the dissolution of those problems cannot disclose anything about experience. Before returning to these issues, it will be helpful to put Wittgenstein's claim about what philosophy can "say" in a larger context. My intention in the next section will be to read Wittgenstein from an Adornian perspective. This is not however, as Adorno reads him (which, as I mentioned, is likely due to Adorno's filtering of Wittgenstein through his reception in Viennese positivism). What emerges from this reading, I believe, is a striking similarity in the view of the world shared by these two philosophers, and an equally striking difference in their theoretical responses to this insight. When necessary, I shall try to demarcate the reading I am proposing from other current readings of Wittgenstein's early work.

WITTGENSTEIN AS A PHILOSOPHER OF DISENCHANTMENT

In a letter fragment dating from 1925, Wittgenstein provides an exemplary depiction of the disenchantment of the world. The fragment identifies the "pure spiritual [religious] ideal" with white light, whilst the ideals of different cultures are compared to the different forms of light that appear when the pure light is passed through "colored glass covers" (2004, 44). A human being living in a culture where the light is "filtered through red panes" will not be aware that this is a certain distortion (*Trübung*) of the one (original-authentic) light, and hence will not recognize the red quality of the light surrounding him/her. Wittgenstein now imagines a situation in which one "comes up against the limit" of this space in which the light appears. Wittgenstein interprets the metaphor as follows:

> The human being in the red glass cover is humanity in a particular culture, for example the Western culture that began with population movements and in the eighteenth century reached a summit—I believe its last. The light is the ideal and the distorted light the ideal of culture. The latter will be taken as *the* ideal so long as humanity has not arrived at the limit of this culture. But sooner or later it will arrive at this limit because each culture is only a limited part of space.—With the beginning of the nineteenth century . . . humanity came up against the limit of western culture. (2004, 44–45)

Aside from the evident influence of Oswald Spengler, what is particularly revealing here is Wittgenstein's clear demarcation of the realm of culture from the religious—the "pure spiritual"—ideal. Culture is by its very nature estranged from the ultimate meaning of things. The self-understandings developed in science, art, and philosophy are tainted by their essential distance from truth and clarity, which are projected beyond the boundary of cultural understanding. This demarcation portrays culture as disenchanted, as witnessed in the recognition of the failure of the expressive possibilities of cultural discourses. This is reinforced by Wittgenstein's description of the three possible attitudes following from the awareness of the limits of culture. The first of these is an attitude of resignation characterized by a mix of humor and melancholy. While melancholy is a mourning over the separation from ultimate meaning, humor plays productively on this sense of detachment. The second attitude refuses to acknowledge the limit as a limit, and treats it as another problem to be dealt with by rational procedures. This is the spirit that sees scientific thinking as a solution to all problems. The third attitude is one that tries to "break through" the glass and attain a perception

of the "pure light." Wittgenstein suggests that all meaningful creation is marked by this "confrontation with the spirit, with the light." Such creation only takes place by way of the experience of limitation, and the struggle to overcome this limitation, while recognizing that the religious light cannot be reconciled with the discourses of profane culture. All meaningful cultural production, Wittgenstein is suggesting, must bear the mark of this confrontation, and yet every attempt to put it into words must fail. Breaking through the world of disenchantment requires, for Wittgenstein, something akin to a Kierkegaardian leap of faith. It is not possible to make an immanent transition to the religious from within the realm of profane culture because culture, as Kierkegaard tells it, has become the realm of impoverished objective contents, cut adrift from the meaningfulness of experience for a subject. It is the emptiness of objective culture that finds expression in Kierkegaard's claim that "the most ludicrous thing Christianity can ever become is to become what is called custom and habit in the banal sense" (1992, 363–64).[11] Wittgenstein's metaphor of the glass cover suggests a similar perspective to that expressed here by Kierkegaard. The limit exemplified by the glass cover denotes a limit to what is expressible in the disenchanted contents of objective culture. While the confrontation with the light can be registered within profane language, this is accompanied by a recognition of the failure to express the "pure light" itself.

This metaphor provides an interesting frame for reading the *Tractatus*'s elucidations on the limits of the sayable. Wittgenstein's comment in the preface to the *Tractatus* that, in solving the problems of philosophy, the book shows "how little is actually accomplished in solving these problems" is intended to signal the intrinsic limitation of the potential of cultural forms to express meaning (1989a, 3). The disenchantment of language, its systematic failure to put experience into words, is captured in the claim that objects can only be *named*: "I can only speak *about* them, I cannot *express them*" (1989a, §3.221). Wittgenstein portrays language as exiled from the deeper meanings of things. Hence language can only say *how* a thing is, not *what* it is. It is plausible to read this distinction in the terms of Walter Benjamin's early essay on language, which was contemporary with the *Tractatus*.[12] In the language essay, Benjamin distinguishes the "bourgeois view of language," in which "the means of the communication is the word, its object is the thing, and its addressee is a human being," from another conception that "knows no means, no object, and no addressee of the communication" (1977a, 144). Although Benjamin's essay is notoriously elusive, it is clear that the comparison concerns a model in which language serves as an instrumental means of communication, and another conception in which language serves as the disclosure of what Benjamin calls "spiritual contents." If language were to become *wholly* expression, then the spiritual essence of the thing would coincide perfectly with, would

itself be, its linguistic communication: Benjamin describes this in terms of the concept of "revelation" (*Offenbarung*) (p. 146). Benjamin uses the mythology of the Fall to depict the mutation of language into a means, a "mere sign," distanced from the immediacy of the name.

Wittgenstein's claim that philosophy "means the unsayable, in that it clearly presents (*darstellt*) the sayable" (1989a, §4.115) and "what expresses *itself* in language, *we* cannot express through it" (§4.121), is evidently comparable with the basic outline of Benjamin's mystical theory of language: the distinction between what language communicates and the spiritual contents it expresses *though* that communication. What is unique about Wittgenstein's formulation is its exhortation to silence—"that whereof one cannot speak"—as the response to the instrumental character of language, the eclipse of the expression of things by the transmission of contents. When words inevitably corrupt an experience, transforming it into a manipulable content rather than something that decenters the self, refraining from words is the first prerequisite for expressing the experience.[13] What is "sayable," according to the *Tractatus*, is simply and solely the world of disenchantment.[14] What Wittgenstein characterizes as mystical experience can only show itself in language. *We* cannot talk about it, since the attempt to do so transforms it into a factual assertion, the registering of an occurrence by a subject wholly detached from that occurrence; to talk about such an experience is to place it under the logic of diremption. This is registered in Wittgenstein's assertion that most philosophical statements are not false but nonsensical (*unsinnig*) (§4.003). They rest on a misunderstanding of the "logic of language," not because (as the Viennese positivists claimed) they transgress against the rules of logic, but because they distort the very nature of the experience that they try to put into words. The meaning of the world, Wittgenstein claims, must lie outside of it. There is "no value *in* it, and if there were, it would not have value" (§6.41).

But how, exactly, does philosophy "mean" the unsayable? And how does the clear demarcation of what *can* be said bring the unsayable to language? One way of looking at this is to say that the delineation of what is sayable in language (which, in the *Tractatus* is equivalent to the realm of factual assertions) brings into relief what is *not* sayable, precisely by outlining the borderline where the two meet. This is the sense of Paul Engelmann's remark that "the logical system of the *Tractatus* outlines the coastline of an island only to get a better view of the boundary of the ocean."[15] Wittgenstein's comment that philosophy "should draw a boundary around the thinkable, and thereby the unthinkable" supports this interpretation (1989a, §4.114). In a letter to Paul Engelmann concerning a poem by Uhland,[16] Wittgenstein very perspicuously outlines what is at stake in this idea. The success of Uhland's poem, Wittgenstein suggests, derives from its adherence to the notion that "[i]f only you do not try to utter what is unutterable then *nothing* gets lost. But the unutterable

will be—unutterably—*contained* in what is being uttered" (1967, 7). The unutterable cannot be said in language, but it can be shown, providing, that is, that one does not *try* to say it. Nothing "gets lost" because the unutterable is kept free from the distortions of conceptual language. By maintaining its somber austerity, precisely by *not* succumbing to the temptation to reach beyond itself, language points to the unsayable by showing (to paraphrase the preface) how little can be accomplished with well-formed statements. As a *via negativa*, the *Tractatus* draws attention toward what is left out precisely through the poverty of what it includes.

It is easy to misunderstand the sense in which language, for Wittgenstein, points toward the unsayable. One prominent interpretation of the say/show distinction in the *Tractatus* has relied upon a distinction between two sorts of nonsense. Hacker suggests that there is a difference between "overt nonsense" (such as gibberish) and "covert nonsense," which is illuminating in a way that overt nonsense is not (1986, 18). While still nonsense, the covert variety is able to "show" something important. James Conant (2002) has referred to this version as the "ineffability" reading. Illuminating nonsense is conceived as a vehicle for grasping what cannot be said; it makes manifest features of reality that the very structure of our language makes it impossible for us to say. What troubles Conant about this interpretation is that it seems to run counter to Wittgenstein's (1980a, §6) thesis that "we cannot use language to get outside language." The illusion that the *Tractatus* wants us to become aware of, for Conant, is the apprehension that there is "something there," that we have something in our grasp when we talk about metaphysics, only it is untouchable by language. On this view, there are only two options: We are either using language to make sense, or we fail to make sense.

This may seem at first glance like a return to the rigorous positivist interpretation, but it is not quite that. This becomes clear in the unwillingness to dissolve ethical (and religious) statements into factual assertions. Cora Diamond (2000), whose interpretation is largely similar to Conant's, has argued that an important role can still be ascribed to ethical statements, even on the assumption that they count as "pure" nonsense. There is an intention that is served by certain linguistic utterances, such as ethical utterances, an intention, Diamond claims, that would not be best served by sentences that make sense (p. 164). Essentially, Diamond wants to claim that the awareness of the nonsensicality of a type of utterance does not necessarily mean that we have to give up the activity of articulating. This activity is rather comprehensible as an "imaginative understanding" of oneself or others, who "may be attracted by the appearance of sense that some plain nonsense presents" (p. 165).

Conant and Diamond lay a great deal of stress on the claim at the end of the *Tractatus* that its sentences are to be considered as "nonsensical" by those who have "climbed out above them" (1989a, §6.54). Wittgenstein, it is

suggested, drives a wedge here between what is *asserted* (which is nonsense) and the *intention* and *purpose* of the author in asserting nonsense. It is clear, however, that Wittgenstein does not intend ethical and religious assertions to be understood as pure gibberish. It is significant that Conant and Diamond are only able to save ethical and religious language from the consequences of their own interpretive strategy by replacing "covert" or substantial nonsense with the idea of "imaginative" nonsense. What is important about this interpretation however is its emphasis on Wittgenstein's dialectical strategy in seeking to undermine the illusion that the statements we construct to talk about what is higher "make sense." Wittgenstein attempts to get inside this perspective and to bring it toward a self-consciousness of its own illusoriness. If, as Wittgenstein claims, "*the limits of my language* signify the limits of my world" (§5.6), then any attempt to put what is outside language into words, *unless those words are recognized as pure nonsense*, must be the result of a misunderstanding.[17]

It is the subtlety of Wittgenstein's position that has given rise to these divergent interpretations of what the say/show distinction is all about. The "Adornian" reading that I am suggesting would put the emphasis slightly differently than the reading proposed by Conant and Diamond. The Adornian interpretation would stress the absolute incommensurability, on Wittgenstein's account, of the language we use and the type of experience our (disenchanted) language can show or express. Wittgenstein, on this view, wants us to be aware that whenever we *speak* about "what is higher," the words we use are pure nonsense, utterly incommensurable with the allotted task. The point is to resist the urge to assimilate the inexpressible to language, thereby placing it under the logic of disenchantment. The point here concerns what happens when that transformation of concepts occurs that Adorno identifies with the process of disenchantment. The key idea is that cognitive experience now gets conceived in terms of the encounter with things *as* things that possess a detachable "value" or property. Things appear as cognitively significant in terms of their value *for* a subject, rather than in terms of their full contextual significance. It is this transition, on the Adornian reading I am suggesting here, that makes sense of Wittgenstein's remark that language cannot speak about "what is higher." What gets thrown away at the end of the book, then, is the belief that language can lead us to the ineffable. This seems to be what is at stake in the Wittgenstein's remark from 1946: "Don't *for heaven's sake*, be afraid of talking nonsense! But you must pay attention to your nonsense" (1980b, 56). Conant's claim that Wittgenstein's intention is to rid the philosopher of the illusion that there is "something" that he is thinking should not be taken as a positivist claim that metaphysics is purely and simply illusory; it is a recognition of the insurmountable rift between the disenchanted language available to the metaphysician and what is involved in an

ethical, religious, or mystical experience. It is the persistent self-awareness about language's inability to say the unsayable that is the pedagogical goal of the *Tractatus*.[18]

This reading appears to be confirmed by Wittgenstein's formulation of the problem in the lecture on ethics. Describing the character of a particular experience, the experience of wonder in the existence of the world, Wittgenstein emphasizes the incommensurability between this experience and the scientific perspective, which dissolves the experience of wonder in transforming it into a state of affairs (*Tatsache*) (1989b, 17). Wittgenstein asserts that we are incapable of "bringing to expression that which we want to bring to expression," hence everything that we *say* about it can only count as nonsense, *Unsinn*. The conclusions Wittgenstein draws from this are revealing:

> I now see that these nonsensical expressions were not nonsensical because I had not yet found the right expressions, but that their nonsensicality was constitutive of their own essence. For I wanted to use them precisely in order to get beyond the world—and that means: beyond meaningful language. It forced me to run up against the limits of language, and I believe this is the urge of all human beings who have tried to write or talk about ethics or religion. (1989b, 18–19)

The reference to running up against the limits of language recalls the metaphor of the glass cover, and the idea that it is the "confrontation with the light" that is the key to the worth of cultural creations. Wittgenstein's intention is not at all to *defuse* the urge to "get beyond the world." It is clear that the positivist interpretation commits a grave error in taking Wittgenstein to be attempting to "cure" us of the urge to do metaphysics. The point is rather this: the attempt to put the unsayable into words reveals the inevitable failure of all such attempts; we are brought face to face with the unbridgeable gulf between language and experience. It is what is revealed in *this* experience that is the key to making sense of Wittgenstein's dialectical strategy. And the key to this experience, for Wittgenstein, is the awareness of the need to maintain the urge to get beyond the world, and at the same to *dissolve* the claim of one's concepts to be able to express a truth content. The point is to reserve ethical and religious experience from the distortions of (disenchanted) language. What one cannot talk about is "passed over in silence," not because one no longer feels a pressing need to say it, but because the words one uses revoke themselves in the very act of being said. The "confrontation with the light" is reflected in the urge to get beyond the world, and this experience is sheltered from the disenchanted world of language by the recognition that any means one could use to render it intelligible dissolves into nonsense as soon as it is expressed.

What I am suggesting is that, although Conant (1992) is right that the primary aim of the *Tractatus* is to unmask our tendency to believe that we are making sense when we use certain strings of words, the insight or the experience that happens to us when the illusion is unmasked is not the one that Conant suggests. Everything turns on what happens when the "mystical doctrine of ineffable truth" is exposed as nonsensical. The "silence" of the *Tractatus* is not a silence pregnant with meaning (as the ineffability reading would have it), but neither is it the silence in which nothing has been said. It is the silence in which meaning is conspicuous by its absence in language. In running up against the limits of language, the *Tractatus* gives us the experience of language as disenchanted. It saves ethical and religious experience by rendering them as unsayable, to be encountered only in silence (or sentences that are, self-consciously, nonsense).

THE DISSOLUTION OF PHILOSOPHY

I suggested that what Adorno and Wittgenstein have in common is an attempt to use philosophical writing to reach an insight about the nature of our conceptual language. I argued in the previous section that, in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein expresses the disenchanted nature of language, and seeks to preserve meaning and value from the effects of reified language by projecting it outside the world. I now want to begin to excavate what lies behind the difference between Adorno and Wittgenstein with regard to saying the unsayable. A good point of entry into this question is the notion of the "dissolution" of philosophy. Both Wittgenstein and Adorno were committed to a thesis on the dissolution of philosophical questions. Working out how these perspectives differ will help us begin to get to grips with Adorno's motives for placing his own view in direct opposition to that of Wittgenstein. Both perspectives turn on the idea that philosophical works are characterized by a certain kind of blindness. This is not because such works are deficient in terms of what they know. Rather, they lack a certain awareness about the status of the concepts used in them. Hence, Wittgenstein and Adorno use philosophical writing to turn attention away from the content, the "knowledge" that the work officially aims at, and toward the way that the work itself functions. The "dissolution" of philosophical questions is supposed to reflect the attainment of self-awareness about the status of philosophical problems. In both cases, one discovers that the nature of philosophical problems is other than one had previously thought. This is not to be thought of in terms of a new piece of knowledge that *solves* the problem, it is rather an insight that puts the problem itself in a different light, dissolving it as a problem requiring a *philosophical* solution.

The clearest statement that Wittgenstein gives concerning this issue occurs in the *Tractatus*.

> One becomes aware of the solution to the problem of life in the dissolution (*Verschwinden*) of the problem.
> (Is this not the reason why those to whom the meaning of life becomes clear after a long period of doubt are unable to say what this meaning consists of). (1989a, §6.521)[19]

A problem that is dissolved is not answered, as is a question to which one provides the requested piece of information. Rather, the problem itself—the demand of the problem for an answer on the terms of the problem—is a sign that something else has gone wrong. Such, for example, would be the case of a question such as What is the meaning of life?, as though this were like a question such as What is the capital of France?, a question one could answer by just providing the right piece of information.

Adorno, in a sense I shall explain shortly, would treat such a question as a "riddle." The "answer" to the meaning of life is provided by a way of living, or rather it is how we relate to the way of living in which we find ourselves. Finding ourselves "at home," or finding fulfillment in a certain way of living is not something that can be extracted as though it were an item of knowledge that we possess about the way that we live. Hence, to ask for the meaning of life, to raise this sort of question, presupposes that we are already estranged from our way of living. The question dissolves—raising it appears pointless—when we once again find ourselves at home in our world. This could be summed up as follows: the meaning of life appears as a problem when there is something amiss at the level of our practical engagements with the world. But the question misstates the problem, as though it were one requiring a *purely* theoretical solution. Hence when life relations no longer produce this estrangement, the unanswerable (because meaningless) question simply disappears.

To follow through on this sort of analysis, one would have to assume that philosophical questions are something like expressive symptoms. Although it is nonsensical to try to answer them, it is possible to interpret them in such a way that they disclose the conditions that are responsible for their appearance. Philosophical assertions can therefore be both nonsensical (because they are expressions of a particular life process that mistake themselves as self-sufficient, soluble in their own terms) and disclosive (because, through rigorous interpretation, they can be made to reveal their dependency on the conditions that govern their appearance). Wittgenstein, however, seems to want to rule out such a possibility. This seems to be implied by §6.5: "To an answer that one cannot express, one also cannot express the question. *The Riddle* does not exist. If a question lets itself be posed, it *can* also be answered." The message

here seems to be that a question is either correctly posed, or it is a mere empty gesture. In this case, the type of self-awareness that is the goal of Wittgenstein's writing is the awareness of the emptiness of philosophical questions. But those questions do not disclose anything about what creates the urge (or, perhaps, the necessity) to raise them in the first place. They are not symptoms, or signs that need to be interpreted. They are rather just empty noise. If one *were* to try to explain why philosophical questions get raised, the only sort of explanation allowable on Wittgenstein's account would be an external one, in terms of a psychological drive to "get beyond the world," for example.[20]

Adorno's *Antrittsvorlesung*, entitled "The Actuality of Philosophy," speaks in a similar fashion of philosophy as concerned with the "dissolution" (*Verschwinden*) of questions. The model of philosophy that Adorno proposes in this essay is that of a form of interpretation (*Deutung*), the aim of which is to dissolve what Adorno calls "riddles" (1971a, 334–35). The interpreter of riddles, Adorno argues, does not look at the riddle as the "image of a being lying behind it," which mirrors the riddle and by which it is sustained. "Genuine philosophical interpretation," Adorno claims, "does not come upon a persisting meaning that lies behind the question"; rather it "lights it up suddenly and consumes it at the same time." A response of the first sort would be one that *answered* the riddle rather than *dissolving* it. One could imagine, for example, an attempt to answer the question about the meaning of life in these terms, in the conception of life as perpetual struggle, perhaps, or in terms of Schopenhauerian will. An answer like this justifies the right of the question to be asked, rather than making it disappear. Genuine philosophical interpretation, in contrast, would reveal the riddle as a symptom; the riddle is used as the key with which to decode the life conditions that make the riddle appear in the first place. This is why interpretation both "lights up" the riddle—it puts it into the context that clarifies why it appears—and at the same time "consumes" it—it shows that the riddle cannot be answered on its own terms because its very appearance is dependent on certain features of the life context. The riddle is dissolved because its dependence is revealed. Hence the dissolution of riddles is intended to be a form of philosophical writing that "disenchants" concepts, breaking through the illusion of their independence.

The illustration that Adorno gives for this process derives from Lukács's (1971, 110–49) discussion of the "antinomies" of bourgeois thought in "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat." Lukács had traced the problem of the thing-in-itself in Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy to its employment of a formal, contemplative idea of knowledge. This in turn, Lukács argued, was an effect of reification created by commodity relations, governed by abstract quantification and formal laws. Adorno imagines interpretation taking place as the construction of a context that forms a figure, the figure being the commodity form

> It could be possible that the problem of the thing in itself would simply disappear before an adequate construction of the commodity form: that, like a source of light, the historical figure of the commodity and of exchange value laid bare the form of a reality, for the hidden meaning (*Hintersinn*) of which the investigation of the problem of the thing in itself had sought in vain, because it does not have a hidden meaning that would be detachable from the first and only time of its historical appearance. (1971a, 337)

The search for a hidden meaning, a *Hintersinn*, would be a form of ontological dualism that would explain the meaning of the thing in itself. A response to the riddle of the thing in itself in these terms treats it as a scientific problem calling for a solution. The riddle is taken as meaningful on its own terms, and the goal of thought is to justify it, to account for it in a way that preserves its right to be asked. The effect is that the riddle becomes severed from the social-historical conditions on which it is dependent. By answering the riddle, the search for a *Hintersinn* blocks the recognition of the dependence of the riddle on conditions outside of it, turning it instead into a purely theoretical problem. It does not, as Adorno puts it, grasp the riddle as a "sign" that has to be decoded (*enträtselt*) (1971a, 334). This would mean using the terms of the riddle to unlock its dependence, disclosing its rootedness in conditions that find expression in the terms in which the riddle is posed.

Adorno makes clear that interpretation does not give the "meaning" of the riddle in the sense that both could coexist, that the answer is contained in the riddle (1971a, 338). Rather, the answer stands in "strict antithesis" to the riddle, and "destroys" it, so that "it is not meaningful, but meaningless as soon as the answer has been decisively conveyed to it." This sounds strikingly similar to Wittgenstein's claim that philosophical problems are to be dissolved rather than answered. However, for Adorno, the interpretation discloses something important about the riddle, something that is obfuscated by the philosophical search for a hidden meaning. Philosophical interpretation "lights up," it illuminates "in a flash" the truth about the dependence of the philosophical concept, thereby bringing the concept to self-awareness.

I am claiming that this is the difference between Adorno's dialectical strategy, and Wittgenstein's approach to the dissolution of philosophical problems. For Adorno, philosophical concepts have a disclosive force, because they "light up" the conditions of their own possibility. Although this cannot be "said" by these concepts themselves (since these conditions structure concepts to work in a certain way), concepts can be interpreted so that they illuminate their dependence on social-historical experience. They strive to "say the unsayable" through the composition of a form of writing that allows them to express their context. It is the context that overcomes the

blindness of philosophical concepts: their entanglement in a world of disenchantment that dirempts subject and object, driving a wedge between the world and the experience of it as meaningful by a subject. Their dialectical interpretation leads concepts to a consciousness of their own dependence on conditions that they do not control. In the 1965 lectures on *Negative Dialectic*, Adorno puts the point in this way

> Philosophy consists precisely in the striving to say what will not let itself be said: that is, what will not let itself be said immediately, not in a single sentence or in a series of single sentences, but only in a context (*Zusammenhang*). And to this extent one must certainly also say that the concept of philosophy is itself the contradiction-laden exertion (*widerspruchsvolle Anstrengung*) to say through its context and through its mediation what will not let itself be said immediately, *hic et nunc*. (2003a, 112)

Adorno is hinting at a form of philosophical writing that steers between the *use* of concepts, in which they are used to advance (scientific) knowledge, and the *misuse* of concepts to produce nonsense. These are the only two possibilities recognized by Wittgenstein.

> The true method of philosophy would actually be this: to say nothing other than what lets itself be said, that is statements of natural science—thus something that has nothing to do with philosophy, and then, when someone wanted to say something metaphysical, to show him that he has not given a meaning to certain signs in his statements. (1989a, §6.53)

Adorno is arguing that the illumination of a concept through its context allows the concept to say something, even though it is not being used to produce a statement. What concepts "say" is not a piece of information about the world, it is something about themselves, and their own relation to the world. The "contradiction-laden exertion," what Adorno elsewhere calls the "despairing exertion" (*verzweifelte Anstrengung*) of philosophy (1973, 82), is the striving that can bring concepts to express the experience that structures their own operation as concepts—the world of disenchantment. The exemption of philosophical concepts from experience, their detachment from "living language" (1973, 66), is not for Adorno attributable to the eccentricities of a peculiar practice that creates imaginary problems. The "detachment from experience" is something that philosophy suffers in the course of its history, something that it cannot arbitrarily abolish, but which it can bring to self-consciousness. For this to happen, philoso-

phy must throw itself into the "despairing exertion" to say what it cannot say, to reach beyond the limits of language. It must *try* to say it, even though it exerts itself in vain.[21]

The revelation of philosophical propositions as nonsensical, the dialectical aim of the *Tractatus*, does not reflect back on the world in which philosophy emerges. The dissolution of such propositions does not "light up" the world to which those concepts belong. It is in this sense that the dissolution of philosophy, on Wittgenstein's account, is not itself dialectical. It leaves the world as it is. Metaphysics appears as a temptation, an impulse, one that does no harm perhaps, but one that is assumed to be as it presents itself, namely a self-contained exercise intelligible outside of its broader social-historical surroundings. From an Adornian perspective, this is a reading that takes philosophy in its enchanted state—as detached from experience—and then uses its detachment to convict philosophy of vacuity. Consequently, it simply fails to give an account of the dependence of philosophical concepts on conditions that find their way into the interior of conceptual meaning.

In the previous section, I argued that Wittgenstein's view of language harbors a penetrating insight into the nature of disenchantment. Wittgenstein, I suggested, recognizes the absolute incommensurability of language and ethical and religious experience. From an Adornian perspective, it appears as if Wittgenstein wants to respond to disenchantment—the failure of the expressive possibilities of language—by reserving the experience of "what is higher" to a realm free from the contamination of reified concepts.[22] I am suggesting that this is only an illusory solution, since it fails to come to terms with the conditions of the world—the disappearance of meaning from social practices—that create disenchantment. Hence the expulsion of ethics from language, the transformation of ethical imperatives into instrumental prescriptions, is taken to be a reflection of the inexpressibility of the ethical. This preserves the purity of the ethical, but at the cost of consenting to its disappearance from the world of practice.

Adorno On Saying the Unsayable

In his essay on the positivism dispute, Adorno states his disagreement with Wittgenstein in terms of a dispute concerning the "postulate of clarity" (1972b, 336–37).[23] Adorno responds to this idea with the predictable Hegelian claim that the exposition ought to be led by the character of the thing (which may be itself more or less "abstruse"), rather than legislated a priori. This does not quite get to the heart of the matter, since the issue, for Wittgenstein, is not about more or less complex thoughts, it is whether the very attempt to *say* certain things leaves us holding on to nothing but nonsense (*Unsinn*). Adorno then

suggests that philosophy may be able to express through mediation, and the construction of constellations, what cannot be expressed immediately. This is played out in terms of the following example:

> [Wittgenstein's] own comportment was . . . much more pliable than his words; thus he wrote to Ludwig von Ficker, who awarded an endowment set up by Wittgenstein to Georg Trakl, that he, Wittgenstein, although not able to understand Trakl's poems, he was nonetheless convinced of their quality. Since the medium of poetry is language and Wittgenstein is above all concerned with language, not only with science, he unwittingly confirmed that what will not let itself be expressed nevertheless lets itself be expressed. (p. 337)

The contrast between "language" and "science" in this passage is supposed to signal the possible use of writing as a process to bring something to expression that concepts in their narrow scientific employment cannot say. I argued above that Wittgenstein has a very restrained view on what can be revealed by philosophical writing as a form of self-reflection. What emerges at the end of the effort to say the unsayable, for Wittgenstein, is the realization that the words one uses to try to express what is outside language do not make sense. What is "shown" rather than "said" concerns the self-reflection on our language, the awareness of the disjunction between language and experience. What interests Adorno about Wittgenstein's comments on Trakl is that they appear to suggest that language *can* sometimes succeed in expressing something even though the attempt to formulate what one wants to say in factual assertions fails. Like Wittgenstein, Adorno wants to call attention to what happens when philosophical concepts fail to say what they want to say. However, Adorno wants to claim that, in trying, and failing, to be fully meaningful, language is able to express the conditions that determine its meaningfulness.

Wittgenstein associates the striving to get outside language with the mystical. The mystical is the "sensation of the world as a limited whole" (1989a, §6.45). It represents the dissatisfaction with the scientific (disenchanted) language of factual assertions, the sense that, even when all scientific questions have been answered, "our life problems have still not even been touched" (§6.52). According to Read and Deans, Wittgenstein wants to question "whether there could be *such a thing as* being able to imagine a perspective where one can survey how language represents the world" (2003, 253). The issue is not whether the mystical impulse is truthful or mistaken, but rather whether there is "any use" for the words we use that "amounts to anything." The very idea of an internal or external perspective on language is seen, on this view, as an expression of the "impulse towards metaphysics," a symptom of the "philosophical illness" that the *Tractatus* sets out to free us from. We are mis-

led into believing that we are making sense when we try to talk about how language represents the world from a perspective outside of it. It is not possible for us to grasp the world as a whole.

To come to grips with Adorno's view, I want to focus on this question of language's failure to grasp the world as a whole. The argument I will defend is that, whereas (as stated above) Wittgenstein wants to *defuse* our temptation to try to articulate the world from this perspective, for Adorno the failure to comprehend the whole is revelatory of language's dependence on social experience. Therefore, if it wants to express its own dependence on social conditions, language must *try* to say it, even though it will fail. On Adorno's reading, the failure of language is not interpreted as the futility of trying to talk about the whole; it is reflected back on the nature of the whole that makes such talk nonsensical. The emptiness of our theoretical pronouncements is a reflection of the subject's withdrawal from the world, and its consequent failure to make sense of it as a world that *has* subjective significance. The impossibility of language articulating the world as a whole, therefore, is a corollary of the fractured nature of the world itself. The objective world has become opaque, frustrating the subject's attempt to penetrate below its surface. This indifference of the objective world, its ideal subject-neutrality, is the core of disenchantment.

The argument can be reconstructed from Adorno's comments on the Kantian "block" in his 1959 lectures on Kant's first Critique. Adorno is referring to the confinement of knowledge to the world of experience, and the restriction of the operation of the forms of the understanding within this world. In the lectures, Adorno portrays the theory of the block as an instance of "metaphysical mourning" (1995, 268). It is the subject's memory of what eludes it, the recognition that its cognitive categories do not reach beyond the surface of the world it confronts. Adorno speaks approvingly of this idea in contrast to positivism, which he portrays as the imperative to "hold fast to the positive, to what is given," and the rejection of anything beyond as ghostly apparitions, mere specters (*Gespensterei, Spuk*). Kant, Adorno suggests, is undecided between two possibilities. On the one hand, there is the tendency to "go right to the extreme" (*bis-zum-Äußersten-gehen*), that is, to *say* something about the world that eludes our categories, and about its form. On the other hand, there is the positivist attitude, which is to hold fast to the given and its forms, thereby ostracizing whatever goes beyond them as mere nothings, illusory apparitions. What is significant about this is Adorno's emphasis that both of these options would be false, or rather both would cut short experience. The refusal to "go right to the extreme" is itself, Adorno asserts, the very expression of a "metaphysical block," and to go to the extreme would be to deny the experience of the block in search of an "unambiguous identity" governed by the understanding (p. 269). But the positivist exhortation to hold

fast to the given does not do justice to the experience of confinement, hence its refusal to mourn is a blindness to this experience. What is significant in this analysis is Adorno's portrayal of Kant as suspended between these two tendencies. On the one hand, Kant wants to preserve the intention of philosophy to "comprehend the whole," but at the same time, he expresses "that this is what thought cannot do, but the sole form in which the whole can be comprehended is the expression that it cannot be comprehended." The Kantian system attempts to project totality, and at the same time, it wants to do justice to the fact that "the totality is precisely not a totality, that subject and object do not merge into one another [*ineinander aufgehen*]." The failure of thought's striving for totality, therefore, is revealed as a truth about the world under the conditions of reification. It is the structure of experience that makes it impossible for Kant to grasp totality, other than as what cannot be comprehended. What characterizes this structure is the subject's role as a passive observer of regularities in experience rather than as a participant in experience. Adorno argues that this is at the root of Kant's epistemology.

> The rigidly dualistic basic structure of Kant's model of a critique of reason duplicates that of a relation of production in which commodities fall out of the machines like his phenomena out of the cognitive mechanism; where, in relation to profit, the material and its own determinateness is as indifferent as it is for Kant, who allows it to be stamped. The end product bearing an exchange value is like the subjectively made Kantian objects that are accepted as objectivity. The permanent *reductio ad hominem* of everything that appears establishes cognition according to the ends of inner and outer domination. (1966, 379–80)

The reference here to the production process is not supposed to be a claim that Kantian epistemology is "derived" from this process. The reference is rather supposed to illuminate the Kantian model of experience by drawing out its embeddedness in a broader structure of social experience. The experiential context that finds expression in both the production process and Kantian epistemology is the "reduction to the human," or in other words, its instrumental value *for* a subject as the sole manner in which an object can be encountered (or to use Wittgenstein's term, objects become *zufällig*). It is *this* reduction of the meaningfulness of experience that is announced in the subject's withdrawal from the world, and which results in the objective world becoming opaque.

In the Kant lectures, Adorno puts the point concerning totality in terms of an imminent antinomy of Kant's thought (1995, 270). What governs the antinomy is that the whole can only be comprehended by spirit [*Geist*] because "it, as spirit, *cannot* comprehend the whole: but it is still able, in a cer-

tain sense, to comprehend this not-being-comprehended and this not-being-able-to-comprehend." My suggestion is that what spirit is still able to comprehend—to express by means of concepts: *begreifen*—is the diremption of subject and object, the disenchantment of the world, by its very failure to comprehend the whole, to unify subject and object into a coherent system. To reach this insight, thought has to strive to *say* what is unsayable, to reach down to the object and put it into words, even though, in a world marked by the withdrawal of the subject, this attempt will fail. It is in the reflection on this failure, that thought is able to comprehend its own dependence on the world, and the roots of its failure to put experience into words. The argument is emphasized more or less explicitly in the following passage. Adorno is talking about the Kantian "block," and its concern with the "most profound" matters of philosophy.

> [The block is concerned] with the attempt to say what one cannot say—and the whole of philosophy is actually nothing else than an infinitely extended and elevated stammer [*Stammeln*]: it is actually always, just like stammering, Dada, the attempt to say what one actually cannot say. (p. 271)

Kant is able to comprehend the whole by his refusal to dissolve the antinomy. It is precisely in the developed tension between the desire for totality, the striving to put it into words, and the impossibility of successfully carrying this through to completion, that Kant is able to express the conditions of possibility of philosophical language. In this experience, language reflects on itself, as if from the outside, because it is able to comprehend its own dependence on disenchantment. This is not supposed to be an insight that is present as a thesis in Kant's epistemology. It is the result of a critical self-reflection that occurs in the process of trying (and failing) to say certain things. The failure to say what it wants to say allows us to step back momentarily and view language as if it were a whole, illuminated by its own social conditions of possibility. For Adorno, the difference between language's trying (and failing) to reflect on itself as a whole, and its defusing the urge to see itself as a whole—the difference between stammering and silence—makes all the difference in the world to the possibility of bringing to expression the conditions that structure language's ability to mean. It is not a thesis, because it is only intelligible through coming to grips with the compositional nature of philosophy. In the course of its striving to say the unsayable, philosophy reveals the impossibility of that very attempt. In the process, it turns—not into the emptiness of silence, but into the vacillation of a stammer—and, suspended between the striving and the impossibility, it lights up the nature of conceptual language as a whole as dependent on social experience.

Reading Wittgenstein as an "unconscious historiographer of the self-alienation of thinking" brings to light the structure underlying his reflections on language in the *Tractatus*.[24] Wittgenstein, I argued, portrays a subject whose language registers the disenchantment of the world, the gulf between subject and object that is finally reflected in the silence of the subject, and the preservation of meaning in a realm untainted by language. However, the truth about disenchantment works "unconsciously" in Wittgenstein's work, or in other words, the work is unable to reflect on itself as a product of disenchantment, and thus it remains blind to its own conditions of possibility. Adorno's comments concerning the need to try to say the unsayable are essentially bound up with this problematic. Adorno wants to draw our attention toward the self-reflective process that occurs when language's ability to say what it wants to say gives out. It is not an insight that is available as a conceptual content, but is rather something that we learn *about* our conceptual language. In this way, language illuminates the nonconceptual as its condition of possibility.

3

Adorno and Benjamin on Language as Expression

I have nothing to say. Only to show.
—Walter Benjamin,
Arcades Project Manuscripts

Benjamin on Showing and Saying

In a letter written in response to an invitation from Martin Buber to publish in his new journal *Der Jude* (The Jew), Walter Benjamin, in 1916, formulates a perspective on what cannot be said in language that is strikingly similar to Wittgenstein's distinction between showing and saying.

> [I]t seems to me that the elimination of the unsayable in language so that language attains the purity of crystal is the form given to us and most accessible to us in order to have an effect within language and, by this means, through language. . . . My concept of a style and a writing at the same time objective and highly political is: to lead to what is refused to the word. Only where this opens itself up in the unspeakable pure power of wordlessness can the magical spark between word and motivated act leap across. (Benjamin 1994, 80)

Benjamin is arguing (a point that he will develop in the language essay of the same year) against the view of language as a means to generate effects. The reference to the "unspeakable" power of wordlessness appears to mirror

Wittgenstein's delineation of what can only show itself in language, although it cannot be said. The comparison was not lost on Adorno who expressed the similarity in terms of the idea that "the ontological asceticism of language is nevertheless the only way to say the unsayable" (1970b, 305). I suggested that understanding the *Tractatus* as a response to the problem of disenchantment makes sense of Wittgenstein's claim that we can only speak about objects rather than express them, and that we can only say how a thing is, and not what it is. I will argue shortly that Benjamin's early reflections on language make this theme explicit. Benjamin uses the mythology of the Fall as a frame for thinking about language's disenchantment. The Wittgensteinian distinction between the religious light and profane culture appears in Benjamin's thinking in the form of a difference within language itself, between divine language, and the instrumental nature of postlapsarian language.

Expressed in language's form, Benjamin will argue, is the truth about this history as the reduction of language to an instrumental means for the transmission of propositional contents. I hope this will become clearer following the analysis of Benjamin's early work on language below, but what I want to foreground here is the pivotal significance of Benjamin's interpretation for making sense of Adorno's understanding of language's ability to say the unsayable, and thus its ability to capture spiritual experience. The silence that marks the boundary of the sayable in Wittgenstein's account appears in Benjamin's reading as the muteness (*Stummheit*) of nature, the loss of its participation in language. It marks the subordination of human language to a process of disenchantment. This reading will provide Adorno with the means to conceive of an expressiveness of language precisely in its failure to say what it strives to say. By striving, and failing, to say what it wants to say, Adorno will argue, conceptual language will disclose the conditions of its own meaningfulness, and these conditions are conceived in terms of the social history of disenchantment. Thus philosophical critique is able to rescue the truth content of a philosophy by showing why it was unable to say what it wanted to say, thereby turning the concepts used within the work toward a recognition of their dependence on the nonconceptual, or their own experiential conditions of possibility.

Adorno's reference to the purpose of philosophy as the translation of suffering into the medium of the concept identifies this moment in which language's failure to put experience into words becomes accessible *as* an experience of the transcendental conditions of language (1973, 83). Those conditions comprise the impoverishment (*Verarmung*) of experience in the administered world, the pain of the world that negative dialectic, by bringing it to self-awareness, is able to raise into the concept (1966, 18). This experience of the conditions of conceptual cognition, in other words, its dependence on a process in which the world is disenchanted, or emptied of signif-

icance, is central to Adorno's idea of spiritual experience. The measure of spiritual experience, Adorno writes, is "what subjects experience objectively as their suffering" (p. 172). For Adorno, as we will see, conceptual cognition is a restricted component of the capacity of language to express experience. He is not arguing that there is something malign about conceptual thinking by itself. He is claiming that conceptual thinking has become split off from the general capacities of language to put experience into words, a process that is coterminous with the dialectic of Enlightenment. Furthermore, it now reserves to itself the right to determine what counts as legitimate cognition. Adorno believes that the consequences of this development are disastrous. This is not merely an intellectual development, of course, but is part of a social-historical process of disenchantment. The way out of this predicament must begin with bringing conceptual cognition to self-awareness about its own conditionedness. Adorno will attempt to achieve this by employing concepts such that the broader, and suppressed expressive possibilities of language can come to the surface within those concepts. This is what negative dialectic attempts to do. The goal is to recover *within* conceptual language the spiritual experience that is rescinded by the constricted operation of conceptual cognition as a form of language.

The first task of this chapter will be to elucidate Benjamin's early essay "On language as such and the language of man." It is in this difficult and obscure essay that Benjamin first articulates his understanding of the expressive capacity of language. I will also look at how the themes from this early essay are developed in Benjamin's subsequent writings on language. I will then turn to the themes of allegory and constellation, as these are presented in Benjamin's *On the Origin of the German Mourning Play*, his failed *Habilitation* work of the early 1920s. I will argue that the ideas developed by Benjamin around these themes are indispensable for making sense of Adorno's philosophical project, and in particular his theory of experience. I will substantiate this claim by looking at how the presuppositions behind Adorno's analyses of philosophical constructions are derived from Benjamin's procedure in his treatment of the German *Trauerspiel* (mourning play). The idea of the constellation will prove to be central to Adorno's view of how language is able to recover its broader expressive possibilities without stepping outside the concept. This is a crucial point: for Adorno, the attempt to restore an expressive power of language that would not be mediated by conceptual knowing is bound to fail.[1] The cognitive priority of the classifying concept is a legacy of the history of disenchantment, and hence philosophy cannot arbitrarily legislate it out of existence. But what philosophy can do (and here the constellation will play a central role) is to employ concepts in such a way that they are able to express something that cannot be said with them. What they express are their own experiential conditions—not in the form of a propositional

assertion, but rather in the form of spiritual experience. In the final section, I will take up the theme of natural history. This idea, I will suggest, is essential for understanding Adorno's interpretive practice.

BENJAMIN ON LANGUAGE

Walter Benjamin's early theory of language, as Max Pensky (1993) has argued, comprises an esoteric synthesis of conceptions stemming from the German tradition of language mysticism (Boehme, Hamann, Schlegel, Humboldt), and the notion stemming from Jewish theology of language as the field of encoded messianic truths. The "mystical" elements informing Benjamin's views on language are most prevalent in the 1916 essay "On Language as such and the Language of Man." However, the interpretation of the use of mystical motifs in this essay is complicated by the fact that Benjamin wrote the essay exclusively for self-clarification, and did not consider the essay suitable for dissemination to a general readership.[2] It is possible to read the theological-mystical references in this work as illustrations that serve the articulation of a general theory of linguistic meaning. Benjamin uses theological references such as "magic," "name," and "revelation" in order to establish a framework for constructing a broader theory of language's power to express meaning.[3] Here, as well as in his later works on language, Benjamin is searching for a formulation of language's ability to disclose experience that does not take the form of the transmission of conceptual content.

Benjamin begins the essay with a definition of language as the communication (*Mitteilung*) of "spiritual contents" (1977a, 140). This is not confined to human language, since forms of animate and inanimate nature can also be said, in a nonmetaphoric sense, to communicate their spiritual content through some form of expression. The theoretical point of this definition becomes clearer through a reflection on Benjamin's demarcation of this form of communication from the exchange of contents between speakers in actual languages. Thus there exists a "language of law" that has "absolutely nothing to do" with the languages in which "German or English legal judgements are written down." Similarly, there is a "language of technology," which is not the "specialized terminology of the technologist." Benjamin goes on to develop this distinction in terms of a differentiation of the spiritual content that is communicated *in* language, and the exchange of verbal contents that takes place *through* language.

> [T]he German language is not at all the expression for everything that we can supposedly express *through* it, but is rather the immediate expression of that which communicates *itself* in it. This "self" is a

> spiritual being [*geistiges Wesen*]. . . . The insight that the spiritual essence of a thing consists precisely in its language—this insight, understood as a hypothesis, is the gaping chasm into which all theory of language threatens to fall. (p. 141)

What Benjamin appears to be aiming at here is a distinction between language as a form of expression, in which there occurs the self-revelation of a "spiritual being," and a referential language which serves the pragmatic function of the transmission of what Benjamin calls "verbal contents" between speakers (p. 143). In the first sense, language is not a means, but rather a "medium," characterized by the "immediacy of all spiritual communication" (p. 142).[4] Its communicative potential, that is to say, does not here rest on the pragmatic function of language understood as a sign system, where the sign makes a specific content accessible in practical-instrumental contexts. The spiritual content that is communicated in language is not in fact something that can be encompassed in a symbolic designation. And this is the whole point of Benjamin's distinguishing of its "immediacy" from the manner in which verbal contents are present in the designative function of language. The pragmatic view of language, in which language functions as a means rather than a medium, is depicted as the "bourgeois conception of language." It states that "the means of communication is the word, its object is the thing, and its addressee a human being" (p. 144). Language is here perceived as "the communication of a thing to other human beings," which occurs "through the word, through which I signify a thing." Language, thus understood, does not communicate a spiritual being *in* what it says, but communicates a thing to other language users *through* the sign by which the thing is represented.

In his insightful discussion of Benjamin's theory of language, Winfried Menninghaus (1980) has argued that Benjamin's early language essay can be understood as articulating the expressive characteristics of everyday language use. The intuitive sense of a communication that takes place *in* language rather than *through* its verbal contents, Menninghaus argues, can be discerned in the focus on linguistic phenomena such as the "tone" of a language (1980, 13–14). The ironic tone of a form of language is a particularly clear example of this, since it expresses something which is not explicitly given or present in the verbal contents of a linguistic form. A further example would be the concept of "style" which, for Benjamin, constitutes the "ineradicable signature of a determinate world view."[5] Style thus represents something about the author's relation to the world that is not explicitly conveyed through the communication of contents in the item of language itself. The "spiritual being" that is communicated *in* the style of a discourse should not be understood in terms of the individual-psychological characteristics of its author. Rather, the "spiritual being" that Benjamin discovers in the phenomenon of style must be

understood as the "expression and intitiator of a communication of artistic production and historical experience" (Menninghaus 1980, 14). That is to say, it is not the psychological particularities of the author that are communicated via style *in* language; style is rather the form in which the nonsubjective historical experience of an epoch expresses itself—behind the author's back, as it were—in a text.[6] In style, that which is not an object of designation is able to be communicated, insofar as it embeds itself immanently into the stylistic formation of the text. As a "spiritual being," it is not something "about which" things are said in a discourse, but it communicates itself immediately through pressing itself into the structure of the text itself.

Benjamin's intention in recovering this idea of the expressive powers of language beyond its transmission of conceptual contents becomes clearer from another essay from his early work, "On the Program of the Coming Philosophy." The task for philosophy that Benjamin lays down in this essay is the epistemological founding of a "higher concept of experience" on the basis of the framework of Kantian philosophy (1977b, 160). Kant's epistemology, Benjamin argues, contains elements of an "opaque" metaphysics that constrict its view of experience. The dismantling of these elements should therefore lead to the recovery of a "deeper, metaphysically more fulfilled experience" (p. 161). Benjamin is claiming that Kant's metaphysics is itself the consequence of a particular historical experience, and the key characteristic of this historical experience is its truncated nature. This is an insight that would prove crucial for Benjamin's later researches, since it sets as the task of philosophy the search for the theoretical means to release the experience that has sedimented itself into philosophical (and also artistic) constructions. What makes this doubly problematic is that the experience in question that is to be released by interpretation is precisely the "shallow" experience of the post-Kantian age. The recovery of experience is coterminous with the disclosure of its own limitation, or its own absence.[7] An element of Kantian speculative metaphysics that must be overcome, Benjamin suggests, is the view of cognition as a relation between a subject and an object. The "subject-nature" of the cognizing consciousness, Benjamin asserts, is to be eliminated in the expanded idea of experience (p. 161). This is explicated as a concept of cognition which does not signal a relation between two metaphysical entities. What Benjamin has in mind here is an experience that is not accessible as a conceptual content, communicable in a statement about the world; it is rather accessible as directly expressed in the *form* of a system of concepts. Benjamin makes this point in his claim that "genuine" experience rests on the pure transcendental subject, rather than the empirical subject (pp. 162–63). The structure of experience, he claims, is to be unfolded out of the "structure of cognition." It is not said in the propositional content that is constructed with concepts. It is rather immediately revealed in the very structure of those concepts. Benjamin is striving

for a way to read concepts as embedding in their structure the image of the historical world, inclusive of the division of subject and object. Concepts therefore express the truth about this historical world, but they do so in nonintentional and nonpropositional form.

In the language essay, the "bourgeois" view of language as an instrumental means of communication mirrors the Tractarian view of language as the assertion of states of affairs, or *Sachverhalte*. On the bourgeois view of language, the world is everything that is the case, that is to say, it is exhaustively expressible in true propositions. In his reflections on the creation story in the book of Genesis, Benjamin opposes this view of language to the name, as the reflection of the word of God in creation. This concludes with a discussion of translation, which is defined as the "translation of the language of things into the language of human beings" (1977a, 151). Despite the formidable difficulties for interpretation posed by this work, it seems clear that Benjamin's goal is to extend the nature of linguistic meaning beyond the specific form in which things figure as propositional assertions.[8] Through the word, Benjamin claims, "the human being is bound to the language of things. The human word is the name of things," as their translation (p. 150). The world, Benjamin is suggesting, already participates in language in some sense prior to its being captured by a subject in the statement of a state of affairs. On this basis, Benjamin is able to conceive of a type of linguistic meaningfulness that does not rest on the separation of subject and object. That is to say, because things express their "spiritual essence" (*geistiges Wesen*) through the word, they disclose their meaning directly, prior to the conversion into the subject-object structure of propositional assertions. Linguistic meaning is therefore situated here outside of the framework of subjective acts that are brought to bear on unstructured material content.[9] The world discloses itself *as* language, and thus names can be said to make objective a historical experience that expresses itself, or communicates itself to human beings in its translation into the name.

In the 1921 essay, "The Task of the Translator," Benjamin takes up once again the distinction between what is expressed in language and the explicit contents that form its subject matter. Here, this is played out in terms of the difference between what is "intended" (*gemeint*) in a text and the "mode of intending" (*Art des Meinens*) that underlies the formulation of the contents (1972, 14). The essence of a poem is not "communication," which here means predicative assertions, but takes the form of a subterranean stratum of meaning inaccessible to a reflection on the explicit content, and which Benjamin characterizes as the "incomprehensible" (*Unfaßbare*) and the "mysterious" (*Geheimnisvolle*) (p. 9). Benjamin draws this distinction a little more sharply by claiming that the "intended" is attached to the "mode of intending" through the "tonality of feeling" (*Gefühlston*) that the words bring with themselves (p. 17). Thus the "incomprehensible" and "mysterious" is expressed in

the text through the qualitative shading that inhabits the word, although it is not accessible as the explicit subject matter of the text itself.

Benjamin takes up the theme of language and expression again in the 1933 essay "Doctrine of the Similar," and the compressed version of this essay from the same year, "On the Mimetic Faculty." The notion of a "nonsensuous similarity" between words and their referents that Benjamin develops in this essay distances itself both from the thesis of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, and from the onomatopoetic thesis that words express their referents through an objective resemblance. For Benjamin, the mimetic or expressive character of language must be understood in terms of the linguistic form or structure, and not as an isolated likeness of word and thing (Menninghaus 1980, 71). The distinction between the communication of a spiritual being and the exchange of verbal contents recurs in the following passage—however this time the term "communication" has become reserved exclusively for the pragmatic function of language.

> This, so to speak, magical side of speech and language [i.e., its mimetic capacity, R.F.] does not wend its way without relation to the other side of language, the semiotic. The mimetic aspect of language is rather a founded intention, which can only ever come to appear in something foreign as its foundation [*Fundus*], and this is precisely the semiotic, communicative aspect of language. . . . Thus the context of meaning that has its seat in the elements of the sentence is the foundation out of which, like a flash, the similar . . . is brought to light. (1977c, 208–9)

Thus the mimetic aspect of language is not, for Benjamin, the form of pure receptivity in which language assimilates itself to the qualities of things. Hence the nonsensuous similarities in language are not directly accessible to intuition. Discerning their presence and meaning requires the creative contribution of an understanding that is able to detect them in the organization and structure of a text or speech, and this takes place precisely through the painstaking interpretation of the semiotic level of language. These nonsensuous similarities show themselves in language, although they are not directly said.

What is common to Benjamin's reflections on language, between the early and the later essays, is the effort to delineate a type of experience that is expressed *in* language, without being reducible to an explicit conceptual content. It is a type of linguistic meaningfulness that does not occur in a subjective act that synthesizes a blind and inert material. In fact, it is precisely the division of subject and object in this model, where the subject is understood as imposing meaning on a recalcitrant world through its power of spontaneity, that Benjamin wants to call into question, or at least to show that model

to be only one of the possible frameworks for thinking about linguistic meaning. What Benjamin is after is a way of making accessible *within* language the experience of the separation of subject and world that is presupposed by the narrow, "bourgeois" view of language as the communication of propositional contents. It is, in other words, the historical conditions of the reduction of language to a means for the transmission of contents that Benjamin wants to make accessible within language. The structure by means of which language represents the world is itself the result of a form of historical experience, and it is this form that must be shown within this structure. In the early language essay, it is the creation story that allows Benjamin to frame the idea of a degeneration of the expressive power of language. It is the fall of mankind in the eating of the tree of knowledge that inaugurates the diremption of subject and object, the division of subject (as the possessor of knowledge) and (mute) object. The root of this transformation is the eclipse of the name (as the translation of the language of things) through the judging word (1977a, 153). The judging word, Benjamin suggests, rests on the knowledge of good and evil. The purpose of Benjamin's employment of this mythological account becomes clear once we see that the knowledge of things, after the Fall, now becomes mediated by knowledge of their value, or usefulness, for human beings. In the judging word, things only become known through the mediation of what they are not, namely, their value in relation to human purposes. This is why the "judging word"—*das richtende Wort*—gives rise to judgment, *Ur-teil*, literally, a primordial or original division. This is the point at which linguistic meaning becomes conceivable as the act by which the subject synthesizes passive material nature. Because it is governed by the value of things for a subject (derived from the knowledge of good and evil according to the speculative reading employed here), the constituting activity of the subject provides knowledge that is instrumental; language becomes a means for judging things rather than genuinely knowing them. The consequence of the separation of nature from linguistic meaning, which is now located in subjective acts, is the "muteness" of nature. In turn, the muteness of nature leads to nature's mournfulness (1977a, 155). "Because it is mute," Benjamin writes, "nature mourns." Benjamin goes on to identify "overnaming" (*Überbenennung*) as the "deepest linguistic ground" of all mournfulness and muteness. With this term, Benjamin wants to capture the arbitrariness of linguistic designation.[10] Language no longer names things, rather, it speaks *about* them; in Wittgenstein's terms, it says *how* they are rather than *what* they are.

What Benjamin reads as the muteness of nature would correspond, on this conception, to the constricted empiricist notion of experience that takes precedence following the diremption of subject and object. In a short fragment on music and language, Adorno speaks of music as containing a theological dimension (1956, 3). This is then articulated in terms of the "human

attempt, doomed as ever, to name the Name, not to communicate meanings." The nonconceptual moment, on this conception, would be conceivable as the experiential openness to the world that makes language and communication possible. But what is captured in spiritual experience is not a reconciliation of subject and object, it is an experience of the world's disenchantment. This is why, to use Benjamin's terms again, "all of nature would begin to lament were it to be accorded language" (1977a, 155). What I am suggesting, then, is that the despairing exertion of philosophy to say the unsayable constitutes Adorno's secularized translation of Benjamin's notion of the Name, the possibility of which is excluded from profane language. It should in no wise be concluded from this way of putting it that philosophy therefore fails purely and simply, *because* it is a failed attempt to say something. The crucial point is that it is precisely in its "doomed" effort to name the Name, to say the unsayable, that philosophy is able to express more than it says. Before we can properly draw out this conclusion and its implications, it will be necessary to examine Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* study, and in particular the dense and obscure epistemological-critical prologue to this work.

TRAUERSPIEL: ALLEGORY AND CONSTELLATION

Benjamin's essays on language furnish an invaluable background for making sense of the notoriously intractable "Epistemological-Critical Prologue" to the 1928 *Trauerspiel* study. Benjamin himself had declared in fact in a letter to Scholem that the prologue represented "a kind of second stage of my early work on language," which was here "dressed up as a theory of ideas" (1994, 261). The prologue to the *Trauerspiel* study had an immeasurable influence on Adorno's two extremely important early essays, "The Actuality of Philosophy" and "The Idea of Natural History," in which Adorno attempts to employ the ideas in the prologue in the context of a dialectical materialism.[11] It is not an overstatement to say that the former essay represents "little more than a gloss" on the methodological insights of the prologue (Wolin 1982, 169). In the prologue, the distinctions that inform Benjamin's essays on language, between the semiotic element which is involved in the transmission of "verbal contents," and the "mimetic" or expressive element, the element that serves as the communication of a "spiritual being," are recast in terms of the oppositions of ideas and phenomena, and truth and knowledge. Benjamin asserts that the idea of a work of art is to be conceived as "something linguistic," suggesting an affinity between the theory of ideas and the notion in the theory of language of an expressive, mimetic element embedded in the linguistic form of a text (1974b, 216).

The prologue argues that these two elements of language are accessible to entirely different cognitive methods. Communicable knowledge is appropri-

ated through a classificatory procedure in which elements are subsumed under concepts. Ideas, or truth, are, however, solely accessible through a form of presentation (*Darstellung*) in which the elements of a text are placed in a configuration that brings the idea to light as the "objective interpretation" of the elements (1974b, 214). As opposed to the presentation of ideas, knowledge, Benjamin argues, takes the form of "possession," to which presentation is secondary (p. 209). Knowledge takes the form of a method in which the intention is to render the object as an acquisition, that is, as a property that falls under the concept. The idea, however, is only accessible as something that is "self-presenting," in which method is not a means to the eventual possession of a fixed content, but is the self-unfolding of the configuration in which truth is "bodied forth" as accessible to "observation" (p. 210).

In the terms of Benjamin's philosophy of language, the prologue depicts ideas as that which is manifested *in* the verbal contents of a work without being formulated *through* them, or in other words, they are not present as the subject matter or content of the discourse. As belonging to a "fundamentally different realm" from phenomena, the ideas are only revealed *in* phenomena without being accessible as a fixed, signifying content. The ideas therefore demand a form of interpretation that is able to make manifest a capacity for expression on the surface of language, in which the signifying content is arranged such that a truth that expresses itself *in* the linguistic form becomes visible. Benjamin claims that such a form of presentation can only proceed by way of the extraction and organization of elements of phenomena through the operation of concepts.

> Through their mediating role, concepts lend phenomena a share in the being of ideas. And precisely this mediating role makes them suitable for the other, equally original task of philosophy, which is the presentation of ideas. Insofar as the rescue of phenomena takes place by means of the ideas, so too does the presentation of ideas in the medium of the empirical. For ideas present themselves not through themselves alone, but solely and exclusively in an organization of the empirical elements in the concept, and as their configuration. (1974b, 214)

Once again here, Benjamin emphasizes the dependence of the expressive aspect of language on a semiotic carrier, here expressed in terms of the subsumptive function of concepts. This is why Benjamin stresses that the ideas cannot be given as the object of an intuition (*Anschauung*) (p. 215). The recognition of ideas is tied to a sustained attention to the cognitive-pragmatic elements as the specific signature on a seal is tied to the wax on which it is embossed. At the same time—and this is where Benjamin wants to guard

against this dependence being understood as the immanence of one element in the other—the idea cannot be reached through a deductive series of cognitive steps, just as the form of a seal cannot be deduced from the material of the wax (1974a, 128). It becomes present rather in the "immolation" of the content of the text, the "combustion of the work" (1974b, 211). It is not too difficult to see what Benjamin is up to here if we recall the statement in the 1933 essays that the mimetic is revealed "like a flash"—*blitzartig*—within its semiotic carrier. The idea is an expressive element that is manifested *in* cognitive structures whilst being at the same time qualitatively different from those structures. Hence it cannot be assimilated by cognitive thinking as a fixed content. It is expressed in cognitive structures as a constellation is expressed in the arrangement of stars, as a form that illuminates the elements by arranging them in the service of the revelation of a deeper truth.

In the *Trauerspiel* study, Benjamin sets out to uncover the expressive potential of one linguistic form in particular, that of baroque allegory. Its importance is signaled in a letter in which Benjamin states that the aim of the book is to deduce "the form of Trauerspiel from the theory of the allegory" (1994, 210). In his investigation of the idea that is manifested in baroque allegory, Benjamin downplays the significance of the cognitive content of these allegories, what they are about. He is interested instead in the truth, in the terms of the essay "On Language," the "spiritual being," that the form of allegorical signification itself brings to expression through its role in baroque drama. Benjamin sets out to recover allegory as an idea by clearing away the ideological misconceptions concerning allegory stemming from German idealist aesthetics, in which allegory is portrayed pejoratively as an arbitrary imposition of meaning. As such, it is contrasted with the "symbol," which represents the appearance of essence in the work of art. In contrast to the presentation of the general in the particular afforded by the symbol, allegory was perceived as an artificial technique of seeking out particulars to fit a pregiven scheme. Allegory consists in a relation between a concrete thing and its signification, the manner in which it means something else. The object that is contemplated in allegory is like the signature or monogram of a signified that lies behind or above it, though never *in* the object (Jennings 1987, 108). Allegory is cursed by the arbitrariness of meaning in relation to being. What motivates Benjamin's discussion is the guiding insight that allegory "is not a playful, illustrative technique, but rather expression, just as language is expression, even as is writing" (1974b, 339). The key thesis in Benjamin's interpretation lies in his claim that it is precisely in the arbitrariness of allegory, its inability to redeem being by raising it into the sphere of an ideal meaning, that its character as expression lies. The arbitrariness of allegory allowed it to express a truth that was inaccessible to its later detractors, a truth concerning the "lack of freedom, the imperfection, the brokenness of the sensuous, beautiful phys-

ical world" (p. 352). Baroque drama expresses this insight, not in the form of a cognitive assertion, or in terms of the subject matter of its specific allegories, but rather through the mode of its employment of the linguistic form of allegory itself. In other words, it is a truth that is manifested *in* the allegorical form without being articulated *through* it as a communicable content. "The haughty ostentation with which the banal object seems to rise up from the depths of allegory," Benjamin claims, "soon gives way to its dreary, everyday countenance . . . [to] the disappointed abandonment of the emptied emblem" (p. 361). Rather than redeemable in an ideal meaning, being is stripped of the semblance of symbolic beauty in allegory and returned to the ground as meaningless, "decaying things" (p. 355). The truth that the allegorical form thereby reveals is a vision of nature and history as a devastated landscape subject to irresistible decay (McCole 1993, 138). In this way, Benjamin's investigation of the language of baroque drama carries out the project, delineated in the essays on language, of understanding linguistic forms not solely according to the instrumental-pragmatic dimension of the communication of fixed contents, but also as a medium of expression, in which truths are manifested that exceed the grasp of the communicable content of a text.

The arbitrariness of allegorical interpretation, the uncertainty attaching to every attempt to articulate the meaning of nature, was explained in terms of the "guilt" of nature, which Benjamin relates to the intuition concerning the fall of the creature (1974b, 398). Benjamin here repeats the statement of the early language essay that "because it is mute, fallen nature mourns." It is precisely through its mortification of meaning that allegory is able to express this way of viewing nature. The hollowing out of meaning in allegory brings to language the lament of nature, not directly, but rather as the very distance between language and meaning. The proliferation of interpretive schemes in allegory mimics the "overnaming" that Benjamin had identified as the fate of postlapsarian language. Allegory "shatters" language, in order to give it, through its fragments, a transformed and elevated expression (p. 382). What is made apparent in the form of allegory, Benjamin argues, is the historical experience of transience. It is this idea that drives the melancholy gaze. The baroque writers encapsulate this insight in their reading of the decay of nature as an allegory for history.

Benjamin's analysis of allegory in the *Trauerspiel* study sheds further light on the preface's distinction between knowledge and ideas. The knowledge *of* nature that is contained in the Baroque's work of allegorical exegesis is kept distinct from what is expressed in the exhaustive work of interpretation itself, namely, the mourning of nature. This is the historical experience that is associated with the *Trauerspiel* as an idea. In its piling up of arbitrary interpretive schemes, allegory shows the distance between language and meaning that reveals the historical experience of fallen nature as an idea. It is the failure of

allegory, when judged in terms of the unity of meaning and being in the symbol, that allows it to reveal this experience of the world. Every idea, Benjamin claims, "contains the image of the world" (1974b, 228). The goal of *Darstellung* or presentation is to rearrange the elements of a text, using concepts, so that this image is revealed in what Benjamin calls an "objective interpretation" (p. 214).[12] The idea, Benjamin argues, does not stand to the phenomena in the same way that the concept of genus comprehends different species within it. Rather ideas "relate to the things as constellations relate to the stars." This means that the only way of getting access to the idea is through the interpretation of phenomena. But not in the form of a general concept arrived at through abstraction. Benjamin wants to claim that the idea appears in the arrangement of the phenomena, although it does not serve their conceptual cognition. Benjamin makes this clear in the following passage:

> The task of philosophy is to restore the symbolic character of the word to its primacy through presentation, in which the idea reaches self-understanding, which is the opposite of all externally directed communication. . . . [I]n philosophical contemplation the idea is set loose out of the interior of reality as the word, which once again claims its naming rights. (pp. 216–17)

In an earlier version of the epistemological-theoretical preface, Benjamin compares this notion of the idea as reaching "self-understanding" in the word, to concepts in which things are apprehended in categories by the "spontaneity" of reason (1974c, 938). This formulation makes clear that the idea denotes a truth content that does not rest on the diremption of a naked facticity and a sense-conferring subject. In other words, it is not ascribable to the work of classification in which things are accorded significance in their relation to a subject. Ideas attempt to bring the things themselves to language by releasing their expression in the word. This, of course, links the idea closely to the earlier notion of the Name in the language essay. But the important thing about the idea is that it is constructed by the arrangement of the "profane language" of concepts. And it occurs as the "self-understanding" of language, that is, it is language's reflection on the historical experience sedimented within it.

I have been trying to show how Benjamin, in the *Trauerspiel* study, develops his early view of language into a form of philosophical interpretation that is directed toward revealing historical experience as an "idea." I now want to turn to Adorno's use of the interpretive scheme that Benjamin develops. Adorno employs a form of philosophical interpretation that shares important features of the Benjaminian conception, and as we shall see, this proves crucial for understanding what Adorno means by spiritual experience.

Adorno and Philosophical Interpretation

I have argued that, in the early works on language and in the *Trauerspiel* work, Benjamin develops a conception of philosophical truth as what comes to expression in language, but is not explicitly said within it. In the preface to the *Trauerspiel* book, this is developed in the form of a view of philosophy as presentation (*Darstellung*) that develops and arranges concepts in such a way that an idea becomes visible in their arrangement. I want, first, to examine the influence of these reflections on philosophical language, and particularly the idea of presentation as saying more than is contained in the explicit theses of a text, on Adorno's interpretive practice. It is not only this thesis that finds its way into Adorno's work, however, as we will see. Adorno in fact will develop the fundamental idea of an allegorical way of seeing (*Anschauung*) that Benjamin finds in the Baroque writers into a key for reading philosophical texts as expressions of a disenchanted world. However, it will be necessary to begin with Adorno's development of the more general thesis about language and presentation.

The "presentation" (*Darstellung*) of philosophy, Adorno claims in *Negative Dialectic*, is not indifferent to it, but is immanent to its very idea (1966, 29). The integral moment of expression (*Ausdrucksmoment*) of philosophy is objective only through *Darstellung*, in language. This idea that philosophy is able to say something in its presentation, in the arrangement of conceptual analyses in a text, that is not itself a conceptual cognition, is the all-important insight in Adorno's philosophical procedure for the recovery of spiritual experience. In an important section of *Negative Dialectic* on "rhetoric," Adorno presents a view of philosophy as the resistance to the "abolition of language" (p. 65–66). The background to this is the idea of a degeneration of the expressive capacity of philosophical language through its increasingly technical and specialized nature, which is itself a result of its entwinement with the disenchanted world. Adorno elsewhere describes this as language's subjection to a "process of reification," by which it is released increasingly from the "confrontation" with its objects and becomes self-standing (1973, 39). Philosophy then becomes exclusively a series of operations that explicate the relations between conceptual contents, instead of being focused on the expression of what is not a concept. This distancing of the concept from what it seeks to express is inevitable, to the extent that it provides for the use of a stable vocabulary for the communication of ideas. At the same time, it is the task of philosophy to recall the dependence of conceptual language on its confrontation with its object. This is the task that Adorno ascribes to the "rhetorical moment" of philosophy. Rhetoric, Adorno claims, represents in philosophy "what cannot be thought other than in language"; it asserts itself in the postulates of presentation, "through which philosophy differentiates itself from

the communication of already known and fixed contents" (1966, 65). Adorno is here making the same distinction between what philosophy says with its concepts and what it is able to express in the presentation of concepts that Benjamin develops in his early writings. The goal of rhetoric is not the recovery of specific content, as though there were a feature or a part of the object "left out" by the concept. More radically, rhetoric aims to recover the truth about concepts themselves as a type of congealed experience about the world. Here, concepts are not figuring as a mechanism that classifies a content, they are instead a surface on which the historical experience of the world has expressed itself.

In the essay "Presuppositions," in a discussion of poetry, Adorno (1974e) expands on this idea of a type of linguistic presentation that is able to say more than is said in signifying language. Conceptual definitions, Adorno here argues, are themselves the result of a process of reification. Fixed meanings are "ripped out" (*herausgebrochen*) of the life of language. Adorno continues:

> The rudiments of that life [of language, R.F.] are however the associations that do not disappear into the conceptual meanings, and that nonetheless join themselves to the words with a delicate necessity. If poetry is successful in awakening the associations in its concepts and correcting the signifying moment with them, so concepts, in accordance with that conception, will begin to set themselves in motion. (p. 437)

Adorno refers to the arrangement formed by these associations as a "subcutaneous context" that takes priority over the surface of the discursive content. It is by means of these associations that a word exceeds what is given in its conceptual definition. Furthermore, by bringing these associations to the surface in its linguistic presentation, philosophy is able to recover the meaning of concepts as the expression of experience. The difference between signification and expression that Adorno develops here recalls Benjamin's distinction between the "judging word" and the "Name." In its signifying function, the concept stands as an arbitrary sign for its content. It denotes that content by "standing in" for it. However, in its character as expression, philosophy strives, like the Name, to put things into words. The important thing to note about this here is that it involves tracing the connections or associations that link a word (concept) to its context. This does not simply broaden the concept, it changes it; it no longer functions merely as an arbitrary signifier but rather as a microcosm of historical experience. The concept, in other words, is not simply "put to use" in order to subsume a given content; through language, philosophy tries to recover (to make explicit by putting into words) the experiential conditions of the operation of our concepts.[13]

This idea of philosophical writing as a process, in which the cognitive insight achieved in the movement through the discursive implications of concepts exceeds what is said with those concepts, is the root of Adorno's reflections on presentation. Further evidence for this can be found in Adorno's paper "The Essay as Form." By placing the emphasis on the *form* or the structure of the essay, rather than its explicit content, Adorno is following Benjamin's claim that allegory is expressive in its structure, apart from the content of the allegorical meanings themselves. Adorno wants to defend the essay against the charge that it is "unsystematic." The manner of this defense is revealing. Adorno argues that the very unsystematic and fragmentary nature of the essay must be understood as a form of expression. The essay, he claims, "thinks in fragments, just as reality itself is fragmentary" (1974f, 25). The requirement of an unbroken deductive chain, the coherence and continuity of the whole is more than just a methodological prescription. As a form of presentation, it also articulates something through its formal arrangement. It is as a form of presentation, Adorno claims, that systematic thinking "prejudges" its object as one possessing coherence, and exhibiting harmony. The essay rescinds the disappearance of the antagonistic nature of the thing, its discontinuity and incoherence, in the very formal presuppositions of systematic thought. Discontinuity, Adorno claims, "is essential to the essay, its object [*Sache*] always a conflict that has come to a standstill." The "cognitive-critical" motif of the essay resides in the way its form manages to put into words the antagonistic and discontinuous nature of its objects. The essay does correct the "accidental" and "isolated" nature of its insights, but it does this in a different way than the abstraction of common properties in the concept. Either through its own insights or in relation to other essays, a "mosaic-like relation" is formed that is able to express general truths without compromising the insight into the antagonistic nature of the world brought to language in the form of linguistic presentation.

Adorno argues that the essay achieves conceptual precision by the relations into which it puts its concepts with each other, rather than through definition (1974f, 20). The expressive potential of presentation, in fact, relies on the point that "concepts are already implicitly made concrete through the language, in which they stand [*durch die Sprache, in der sie stehen*]." The goal of presentation is to draw to the surface the meanings that are implicit in the relations between concepts. This process generates a self-reflection of concepts that recovers, as Adorno puts it, "how they are already unconsciously named in language." In contrast to this, the demand for strict definitions of concepts removes (*schafft weg*) the disconcerting and threatening aspects of things that are preserved in concepts (*die in den Begriffen leben*). The picture of linguistic presentation that emerges here is one that conceives the moment of the signifying force of concepts, and the expressive potential of language as

in a perpetual state of tension. These are not two independent and opposing possibilities, but rather two diverging tendencies that, together, determine the cognitive significance of language. Adorno believes that the success of language in putting experience into words is conditioned by the interplay between these two tendencies. Language will be most successful in cognitive terms when each of these moments is able to make itself as receptive as possible to the other moment. Simply put, expression must strive to transform itself into concepts, and concepts in their turn must open themselves out so that they function more like expression. In no sense does Adorno argue that concepts are malign in themselves; his criticism is directed at a certain employment of concepts that curtails the interplay between conceptual signification and expression. To want to return to *pure* expression would be to sacrifice the knowledge of experience for the proximity to it. For Adorno, it is clear that there can be no genuine cognition without the break with the world of experience that is made possible by the concept. This is why the "utopia of cognition" is to "unseal the nonconceptual *with concepts*," not to leap beyond them (1966, 21; my emphasis). But concepts can become unreceptive to the moment of expression, as happens when explicit definitions supplant the interpretive work of teasing out the shades of meaning by the investigation of the contexts that are the points of contact between the concept and experience.

Adorno's discussion of how concepts and expression could become receptive turns on the idea, modeled in the form of the essay, of the "interplay of concepts in the process of spiritual experience." Adorno expands on this idea as follows:

> In spiritual experience, concepts do not constitute a single continuum of operations, the thought does not advance in a single direction, but rather the moments are interwoven with one another as in a dense fabric. The fruitfulness of thoughts depends on the thickness of this interweaving. Actually the thinker does not think at all, but makes the thinking self into the scene of spiritual experience without unraveling it [*ohne sie aufzudröseln*]. (1974f, 21)

The verb *aufdröseln* in this passage foregrounds the nature of the receptiveness of concepts to expression as the potential for their meaning to be enriched by the process in which they are articulated. It is the potential for thinking to hold together the multifarious interwoven strands, allowing them to inform one another, which determines the success of thinking as a scene of spiritual experience. In saying that the thinker "does not think at all," Adorno does not mean that conceptual determination is absent. His point is rather that the demands of conceptual clarity (in the sense of a single, assertible signification

for each concept) and certainty (as the ease of determining the application of a concept) are subordinated to the need to open up points of contact between concepts and experience, allowing the latter to permeate the former.[14] Although Adorno is clear that subordinating clarity and certainty does carry risks, it is clear that the cognitive gains far outweigh the risks.[15] Adorno depicts the cognitive superiority of this interplay of concepts in terms of one of his favorite metaphors: the émigré learning a foreign language (p. 21).[16] The émigré develops a far more refined sense for the nuances of a word by experiencing its use in a multitude of different contexts. As opposed to the familiarity with these contexts, general definitions are rather clumsy, and in certain situations even misleading. Adorno believes that the task of philosophical writing is to reverse the tendency of concepts to detach themselves from the nuances of contextual significance. Making concepts receptive to the moment of expression is therefore to allow the context in which a concept is experienced to inform its cognitive significance.

At this point it is worth considering a couple of objections that may be raised against Adorno's theory. The first concerns the claim that, with his emphasis on expression, Adorno is subjectivizing cognition, and thereby is obscuring the distinction between a purely personal perspective and truth. The second objection will suggest that Adorno's notion of presentation sacrifices the stringency of argumentative justification. In the Hegel lectures, Adorno deals explicitly with the possible objection that the expressive moment is simply a subjective *Weltanschauung* or worldview, the thinker's own private perspective (1993b, 137–38). Adorno asserts unequivocally that expression is "itself objectively determined." This is then equated to the idea of "historically manifested truth." Subjective experience, Adorno argues, "is only the outer shell of philosophical experience, which develops beneath it and then throws it off." The whole of Hegel's philosophy, he claims, is an effort to translate this spiritual experience into concepts. Adorno's argument here goes to the core of his response to the problematic of disenchantment. What he is arguing against is the elimination of subjective experience as *merely* subjective, the move that drives the tendency to conceive truth in wholly subject-neutral terms. It is this conception, Adorno believes, that is responsible for the tendency of the concept to pull apart from the moment of expression. Adorno's fundamental claim is that, although this movement is certainly understandable in terms of the *practical* value of a subject-neutral perspective on nature (i.e., its indisputable success in securing control over natural processes), in *cognitive* terms it actually represents a regression, at least when it arrogates to itself the sole authority for determining cognitive significance. In referring to what is excluded on this conception as "historically manifested truth," Adorno is not simply arguing that subjective experience, so to speak, fills in the historical details that enrich a subject-neutral perspective. More substantively, he

is arguing that the subject-neutral perspective cannot reflect, within itself, on what kind of truth it is. That is to say, it cannot reflect on its own dependence on historical experience. For Adorno, this is not merely an oversight; it is rather structural, because the denial of its dependence on history is in effect built in to the subject-neutral perspective.

A defense of Adorno's argument in this passage requires making sense of the claim that the assumption, central to epistemology, of an independent subject that first confronts the world of objective nature armed with its categories, is itself a historical construction. More specifically, it is rooted in the natural-scientific demand for a perspective on nature that maximizes the potential for control and calculability. In a reading that echoes Adorno's in important respects, John McDowell has argued that science disenchants nature through its demand for a "dispassionate and dehumanized stance for investigation" (1998a, 175).[17] The result of this is that any candidate feature of reality that science cannot capture is "downgraded as a projection." This is another way of stating the Adornian point that the natural-scientific perspective, when it becomes dominant in social-historical terms, usurps authority on what counts as cognitively significant. McDowell argues that we must "rid ourselves of the hankering to acknowledge something brutely alien to subjectivity" (p. 183). Similarly, Hillary Putnam has argued, against the idea that there could be an "absolute conception of the world," that we "cannot have a view of the world that does not reflect our interests and values" (1990, 178). Again, this is translatable into Adorno's thesis that the immediate—the world shorn of subjective significance—is always already mediated. Or in other words, the beginning point of classical epistemology, the synthesizing subject standing opposed to the mind-independent world, is itself a result of a conceptual construction of the world. This is where negative dialectic begins, as the effort to uncover the experiential presuppositions that are buried within philosophical concepts.

If the critique of natural-scientific epistemology is plausible, then the next step in Adorno's argument is readily defensible: there can be no absolute distinction between "subjective" experience and experience that genuinely concerns the world. The question of whether a subjective experience discloses the world or distorts it is one that can be answered only by another account of experience; it cannot be resolved by appeal to a perspective beyond the experiencing subject. The claim that mediation precedes immediacy is not the claim that we must "work though" subjective experience to get to what is there anyway. It is rather that what is "there anyway" is itself an abstraction that is to be explained by the interaction, or mediation of subject and object. Putnam's claim that we cannot have a world that does not reflect our interests and values therefore needs to be complemented by the converse claim that we cannot have interests and values that do not, in some sense, reflect the world. Not

in the sense that they are determined by it, but rather that they reflect our life and interaction with it. When Adorno says of Hegel that, even when he flies in the face of experience, "experience speaks from him," he is emphasizing the cognitive centrality of subjective experience that is an implication of this argument (1993b, 87). In the theory of spiritual experience that comprises the introduction to negative dialectic, Adorno makes this apparent in terms of the extensive use of the idea of experience as "opening up" the world, disclosing what is hidden in the regular employment of conceptual categories. In one revealing passage, Adorno speaks of the need to "open up" (*aufschließen*) things by recourse to "how they became" (1966, 36). This latter phrase references the mediation of subject and object that underlies the construction of things in natural-scientific epistemology.[18]

Turning to the second objection, the centrality of expression in presentation might suggest that this approach relativizes the worth of argumentative justification in its suggestion that some things are simply expressed, rather than actually argued for. Put more forcefully, it could be objected that the claim that expression is not ultimately convertible into the discursive terms of explicit argument is false. Adorno may perhaps be right that the essay expresses something in its form, but it is not implausible to say that this could just as easily be said in discursive terms (as I tried to do above, in fact). Adorno's unwillingness to translate what is expressed into argumentative form would thereby derive from an unwillingness to submit his key insights to the rigors of argumentative justification. In response to this, it must be recalled that, for Adorno (as for the early Wittgenstein) philosophical language is a process in which (to use Adorno's terms) "what happens in it" is more important than specific theses. This means that philosophical insight is reached in what is revealed about our concepts in the very act of using them. In the very form of a philosophical presentation, something is disclosed about the world. It is intrinsic to any processual demonstration that the justification of an insight is inseparable from the process in which it is revealed. Adorno is making this point when he suggests that philosophy should not aim for cognitions that are exact and airtight, but rather ones where "the question of rightness judges itself" (1951, 86). He puts this idea in terms of an abolition of the distinction between "thesis" and "argument." This is interpreted as follows:

> From this perspective, to think dialectically means that the argument should take on the solidity of the thesis, and the thesis should contain the fullness of its justification within itself. All transitional concepts, all connections and subordinate logical operations that are not in the thing itself, all conclusions that are secondary and not saturated with the experience of the object must disappear. (p. 86)

The point that Adorno is getting at here concerns the mutual receptivity of expression and argument. Presentation makes these two moments illuminate each other, so that the criteria for judging the object emerge from its articulation in language. Adorno's point, therefore, is one about how discursive justification is supposed to work. He is arguing that its effectiveness depends on how closely it is tied to the articulation of what it is supposed to be judging. It is always possible, of course, to sacrifice the task of mutual illumination of expression and argument for the sake of brevity and clarity (sometimes, in introductory textbooks, for example, it is even necessary to do so). However, this is always a second best, even a shorthand for an exhaustive justification because the criteria for judgment are not able to closely track the qualities of what is being judged.

CONSTELLATION AND NATURAL HISTORY

I have been arguing that Adorno develops insights in Benjamin's early theory of language into a general theory of philosophical interpretation. The basic idea is that the movement of conceptual analysis reveals something that is said in those concepts, but is not explicitly stated through them. What is revealed is not a conceptual cognition because it is the self-reflection of those concepts. In other words, concepts disclose their own dependence on experience. This is not experience in the sense of blind content that awaits conceptual arrangement, but rather social-historical experience. Concepts, Adorno believes, will express this dependence through their formal characteristics, and it is the task of interpretation to bring this dependence to the surface. Now I intend to argue that Adorno is able to employ this thesis in a conception of philosophical interpretation as the critique of disenchantment. To substantiate this claim, it will be necessary to show how Adorno develops Benjamin's reading of allegory in the *Trauerspiel* study into an interpretive practice for decoding the experiential conditions of philosophical concepts. To reach this point, the idea of philosophical writing as encompassing expression will have to be further refined. It will also be necessary to take up a discussion of the idea of constellation, which Adorno also adopts from the *Trauerspiel* study.

In the *Trauerspiel* study, Benjamin, as we saw, claims that allegory is not to be conceived as an arbitrary aesthetic device. Rather, it is intimately related to the historical experience that governs the creations of the Baroque writers. The "empty world" that, according to Benjamin, confronts these dramatists is expressed in terms of the chasm between the fallen world and salvation (1974b, 317). I want to suggest that Adorno also locates a historical moment that governs the works that are the subject of his interpretive endeavors. That moment, as Adorno puts it in the 1964–65 history lectures, is the "decay of

[philosophical] systems" (2001, 183). According to Adorno, this is what conditions the "transition of philosophical thinking into hermeneutics" (p. 182). Adorno had expressed this same idea in the *Antrittsvorlesung* in the form of the claim that the idea of an autonomous *ratio* that could develop the concept of all reality and reality itself from out of itself has "dissolved itself" (1971a, 326). The Lutheran understanding of the God-forsaken world that informed the Baroque perspective on the ruins of history is here secularized in the contemplation of the ruins of philosophical systems. Philosophy, Adorno claims, now has the task of constructing meaning through the interpretation and arrangement of these fragments. Philosophical thinking now only preserves the hope of achieving an equitable and just world in the "traces and ruins [*Trümmern*]" that lie before it as material for interpretation.[19] Following the Benjaminian motif that the truth content of a work comes fully to light only in its decomposition, that is, once the aura of a work has decayed in its historical obsolescence, Adorno claims that systematic philosophy offers up its truth content at the moment when its failure has become apparent.

Aside from the 1932 natural history essay, which contains a discussion of allegory as the "expression of a historical relationship" (1971b, 358), there is no extended discussion of the notion of allegory in Adorno's published works. This might suggest that the influence of this idea waned as Adorno developed his mature philosophical position, leading up to *Negative Dialectic* in 1966. However, this seems not to have been the case. At least as late as the 1964–65 lectures on history and freedom (which were the basis for one of the sections of *Negative Dialectic*), Adorno was using the notion of allegorical interpretation developed by Benjamin to frame his own thoughts on philosophy as an interpretive practice. In these lectures, Adorno refers to the "penetrating gaze of allegory [*allegorischer Tiefblick*]" as the "model of the philosophical gaze as such" (2001, 188). Adorno continued to draw on the idea of allegory because it provided the means to formulate a view of language as expressive precisely in its failure to say the unsayable. The collapse of meaning into empty signification in allegory could be read as a frame for a type of interpretation that sought to maintain a disjuncture between philosophic truth and historical immanence. It is this motif that Adorno develops into a type of interpretive practice that works as the self-awareness of the disenchanted world.

In order to reconstruct this argument, it is necessary to return once again to Adorno's explicit views on language. In an early fragment entitled "Theses on the Language of the Philosopher," Adorno argues for the contemporary convergence of philosophical critique and the critique of language (1971c, 369). This is made possible by a recognition of the historical situation of philosophical language. "Today," Adorno argues, "the philosopher confronts a decayed language. His materials are the ruins of words, to which history binds him" (p. 368). The words of philosophy that are objectively to hand are "emptied of being"

(p. 369). Obviously, the Benjaminian theme of the "fallen" nature of language is in play here, and Adorno is using it explicitly to characterize the state of philosophical language after the failure of idealist systems to re-create objective order from out of the capacity of the subject to structure experience.[20] But what is striking about this essay is that Adorno couples this idea to a forceful critique of the notion of the arbitrary nature of the sign. "It is a sign of all reification through idealistic consciousness," Adorno states, "that things can be arbitrarily named" (p. 366). The mention of idealism here denotes a view of linguistic meaning as rooted in the spontaneity of the subject, that is to say, as an intention that is separable from the sign as its arbitrary carrier. In place of this idea, Adorno suggests the following:

> Through language, history wins a share in truth, and words are never merely signs for what is thought under them, but rather history forces its way into words, constitutes their truth character, the share of history in the word determines absolutely the choice of each word, because history and truth meet in the word. (p. 366–67)

As in the case of allegory, the truth that comes to the surface in philosophical language will therefore be a truth about historical experience. And because philosophical words are "never merely signs," this will hold true of the ruins of words that confront the philosopher after the decline of idealism as much as those of any era.

Adorno is here developing a view of philosophical language that manages to steer astutely between the formalist-semiotic view of the arbitrary nature of signification, and what Adorno perceives to be the Heideggerian theologizing of language. The latter, Adorno suggests, desires to reanimate the fragments of philosophical language by recovering the "ontological power of words," or their "unbroken dignity" (1971c, 367, 369). As Adorno makes clear in *Jargon of Authenticity*, his most sustained treatment of Heideggerian language, the problem with this approach is that it assumes that words can still function like names, that is to say, that the broken language of philosophy can unproblematically recover its aura by saying the unsayable. The theologizing of language that Adorno associates with Heidegger lacks any appreciation for the nature of the philosophical enterprise as a "despairing exertion" (1973, 82), that its striving to put experience into words is resisted by the failure of its words to recover their function as names. Heidegger, Adorno claims, simply uses the fragments of everyday language as though that language were sacred. The most perspicuous statement of this criticism occurs early in *Jargon*.

> The jargon corrupts [*verschandelt*] what is highest [*das Oberste*], which is to be thought and which at the same time resists thinking,

> in that the jargon acts as though—"always already" [*je schon*] as the jargon would say—it was in possession of it. What philosophy aims at; what is proper to it, and for the sake of which presentation is essential to it, is the condition that all its words say more than each one says. . . . [In the jargon], [w]hat the words say in excess of what they say [*Was die Worte mehr sagen als sie sagen*] is once and for all entrusted to them as expression. (1964, 13–14)

This is where we come to the core of Adorno's conception of language and the role of philosophy as an interpretive practice. In ignoring the tension between what words say and the "more" that they say in excess of what is said (which is precisely the difference between language as communication and language as expression), the jargon abolishes the distance between truth and what is said in philosophical concepts. As Adorno puts it, it cancels the "transcendence of truth" above the "meaning of individual words and judgments" (p. 13). But now it is important that this critique of the sacralizing of language should not drive us back to the opposing idea of the purely arbitrary nature of signification. And this is where Adorno will employ the thesis concerning the historical nature of philosophical language to avoid the errors of both of these positions. Against the Hedeggerian view, Adorno will maintain the transcendence of truth in relation to the immanence of language (comprising what is said within it). However, *pace* the formal-semiotic view, he will argue that the arbitrariness of language, its failure to put truth into words, is *itself* expression, and what it expresses is the historical experience of the disenchanted world. It is because language cannot say what it wants to say that it works as expression, just as allegory, through the collapse of signification, expresses the rift between the human condition and divine redemption. Adorno neither wants to imbue language with the magic power to name things, nor does he want to argue that philosophical concepts are *mere* signs, cut adrift from historical experience. The claim, or so I will argue, is that by reflecting on itself as a historical ruin, philosophical language reveals the Name negatively, as what cannot be said with philosophical concepts. I will try to unpack this idea in what follows.

The argument thus far has suggested that what is shown but not said in philosophical concepts is the distance between language and transcendence. Adorno opposes Heidegger's theologizing of language because it ignores the rupture between immanence and transcendence, and instead presumes that philosophy already holds metaphysical meaning as the secure possession of its concepts. The jargon assumes that philosophy is able to *say* what it wants to put into words, and therefore, according to Adorno, it "fills out the breach that was created by the socially necessary decay of language" (1964, 43). The decay of language that Adorno is talking about here is driven by disenchantment, which is ultimately ascribable to the impulse to control nature. Conversely,

what goes wrong with the account of the arbitrary nature of the sign, which Adorno identifies broadly with the positivist perspective, is that it is simply blind to the historical experience that drives the decay of language, the process that eviscerates the potential of concepts to articulate experience. Hence the opposing position cannot understand the nature of arbitrary language as expression. The "block" which "language erects before the expression of undiminished experience," Adorno notes in a telling passage, "becomes an altar for the positivists" (p. 39). It should be evident here that the Heideggerian philosophy, and positivism represent for Adorno the two mistaken ways of dealing with the Kantian block (the restriction of cognition to diminished experience) that he identifies in the Kant lectures.[21] Whereas Heidegger attempts to abolish the block by reaching for the unsayable, positivism treats it as a taboo on knowing. Adorno's point, in contrast, is that the despairing exertion to transcend the block discloses the historical experience that makes the saying impossible. What words are able to say that is "more than they say" is their own inadequacy. They point, negatively, to a meaning that would be fully present to the concept. Thus the Name is revealed as what cannot be said in the process of the negative self-reflection of philosophical language. It is precisely the unspeakableness of undiminished experience that gives expression to the nature of the disenchanted world. Philosophy cannot stop in silence before the block on language, since the distance between language and transcendence is established in the course of trying (and failing) to say it. Philosophy is most expressive in stammering (as allegory is most expressive when meaning collapses into empty signification).

Adorno's argument rests on the claim that arbitrary (or disenchanted) language can work to express something (a truth about language and its relation to the world as a whole) that cannot be directly stated (since to "say" it would transform it from a reflection on the limitation of language into a content graspable *within* language). Adorno's understanding of what type of linguistic presentation could reveal truth without making it immanent to language remained constant throughout his career, and was a direct adaptation of an idea that Benjamin had developed in the prologue to the *Trauerspiel* study. This was the idea of constellation, that Benjamin had described as making accessible a truth, in the form of "ideas" that was not available to discursive knowledge articulated in concepts. Although ideas are formed by an arrangement of concepts, Benjamin suggests, they are not contained in those concepts. Rather, the idea is an "objective interpretation" (1974b, 214). The constellation shows the truth, it does not assert it in propositional form. David Kaufmann has rightly emphasized that a central motivation in Benjamin's employment of this idea lies in the "protection of the transcendent from any incursions by the immanent" (2000, 66). In the terms of Benjamin's early philosophy of language, the constellation conveys the Name whilst holding it

apart from the cognitive categories of profane language.[22] In *Negative Dialectic*, Adorno makes this same point concerning the constellation as the appearance of the Name through its absence in language.

> The determinable failure of all concepts necessitates the citation of others; therein originate those constellations, to which alone passes over something of the hope of the name. The language of philosophy brings itself close to the name through its negation. What it criticizes in words, their claim to immediate truth, is almost always the ideology of a positive, existing identity of word and thing. (1966, 62–63)

Adorno is here making the point that the constellation recovers the idea of metaphysical truth through the reflection on what cannot be said in language. The process in which a constellation is formed is the same as the movement in which each concept undergoes a self-correction through the relation in which it stands to others. At the end of *Negative Dialectic*, Adorno asserts that metaphysics is not possible as a "deductive context of judgments" about what exists. It is possible solely as a "legible constellation of the existing" (1966, 399). The constellation, in other words, is a form of writing that brings to self-awareness the block on experience that curtails what concepts are able to say. It does this by presenting metaphysical experience, not as discursively available, but rather as what is shown in the negative self-reflection of conceptual content. Adorno identifies this moment as the achievement of *Selbstbesinnung*, or "self-awareness." Concepts are revealed in *Selbstbesinnung* as dependent on historical experience in their very structure. Hence concepts point to it as what is expressed in language, and as what is revealed in the reflection of concepts on their own conditionedness.

Adorno tends to speak of the constellation as disclosing or even unlocking the historical nature of the object. Adorno suggests that this requires the understanding of an item of experience as the locus of an "immanent" universal (1966, 165). In saying that history is "inside it and outside it," Adorno is making the point that every item of experience is a congealing of multiple processes that make it accessible as the kind of thing that it is. The constellation makes it possible to read the item back into these processes, dissolving it into its context so that the fixed distinction between inside and outside disappears. Every feature of the item in question is read in terms of the context, and in turn each contextual feature illuminates the specific nature of the object. The object is therefore "spiritualized" because it bears within itself a social-historical meaning. The point at issue in the present context is that the opening up of historical experience, through the constellation, takes place according to the interpretive scheme of the idea of natural history (another term that Adorno borrowed from Benjamin).

The governing insight behind the idea of natural history as an interpretive practice is that the revelation of the world in its disenchantment (which, as we saw, means the awareness of the dependence of the concept) at the same time projects, as its negative self-reflection, the state of redemption (that is, a state of the world beyond disenchantment). The connection between these two moments is established in the claim that "[t]he need to let suffering speak is the condition of all truth" (1966, 29). Shortly after this claim in *Negative Dialectic*, Adorno asserts that "the freedom of philosophy is nothing other than the capacity to give voice to its unfreedom." These comments are offered in the context of a discussion of the "moment of expression." I will sketch the argument in schematic terms here, and then try to flesh it out with the more substantive discussion in the 1964–65 lectures on history and freedom. It should be clear from the foregoing argument that suffering "speaks" precisely where language reflects on its inability to put experience into words. This failure opens a breach within immanence, in which the transcendent appears within it as what cannot be said (and therefore as external to concepts). What Adorno calls the "unfreedom" of philosophy is its dependence on historical experience, which, in turn, is not the idealist story of a self-realizing subject, but rather the subordination to "nature," by which Adorno means that it is driven by blind, nonrational forces. But because interpretation retains the striving of thought to say the unsayable, even though it is impossible within current experience, it maintains the possibility of redemption in the form of hope. It is therefore the constant exertion of thought to say what it cannot say that preserves the transcendent within thinking.[23] This is why Adorno claims that hope, "as it struggles free of reality, insofar as it negates it, [is] the sole form in which truth appears" (1951, 123). Hope is nothing other than the appearance of truth through the negative self-reflection of the untrue, the experience that is the end of Adorno's interpretive strategy.

It is in the context of this (speechless) appearance of a state beyond disenchantment in the form of hope that Adorno, in the 1964–65 lectures on history and freedom, refers to the "transition of philosophy into critique" as a "secularizing of melancholy" (2001, 188). The melancholy that expresses itself critically in relation to phenomena, Adorno claims here, "is the critical-philosophical way of proceeding as such." The key to this idea is the way in which nature and history are read out of one another.[24] Every historical phenomenon is read in terms of the nature that passes away within it, and therefore as an expression of transience. This is what gives to interpretation its demeanor of melancholy gloom (*Schwermut*) (p. 188). But at the same time, nature appears as historical, as every appearance of "nature" is traced in terms of historical processes.[25] By reading the phenomena of history as ciphers of their own subordination to nature or *Naturverfallenheit*[26] their interpretation comes to coincide with the critique of "what the world has made of phenomena" (p. 189).

What Adorno has in mind here is roughly as follows: the presentation of the phenomenon, it was suggested earlier, dissolves it into its context; however, since the elucidation of this context, in the final analysis, will comprise the expression of the disfigurement of these phenomena through the logic of disenchantment, the interpretation of each phenomenon must entail an (unsaid) projection of what it would look like free of the subordination to natural history. The disfigurement of the phenomenon, that is to say, is read in terms of its entwinement with a context that is historical through and through. The shape of each phenomenon in the state of redemption is therefore held on to in the form of possibility. As Adorno puts this in the lectures, the "negativity" of natural history holds fast to "the *possibility* of phenomena as opposed to the mere being that they represent" (p. 194). This is equivalent to the definition of interpretation as the insistence on "the more that phenomena say, and also the more that concepts say, than *what* they say" (p. 195).

The dialectical interpenetration of nature and history in interpretation works to prevent either moment from being posited as the transcendent structure of the meaning of phenomena. On the one hand, in the dissolution of (second) nature into history, the present properties that attach to objects are revealed as belonging to them contingently, rather than being the permanent and "natural" characteristics of things. As something that has become the way that it is in history, the structure of institutions and relations that takes on a quasi-independence as second nature is revealed in its contingency and in its possibility of being otherwise. In the detection of its mediation through history, then, "nature" is prevented from functioning as a normative justification of the way things are. On the other hand, the dissolution of history into nature works against the emergence of a positive meaning of history over against phenomena, where, as in Hegel's *Weltgeist*, the realization of reason in history would justify everything that happens to phenomena in its name. With the disclosure of the suffering of nature in history, of the worldly phenomena that pass away in it, history is revealed as the discontinuous history of unreason, which remains "in the spell of the blind context of nature" (2001, 179).

Rather than redeeming phenomena through their symbolic transfiguration, natural history faces up to the world in all its unredeemable suffering. Characteristic of its perspective, Adorno argues, is a "melancholy immersion," conscious of history as permanent decay and nature as permanent transience (2001, 188). Adorno takes care to distinguish the melancholy immersion that is brought to bear in interpretation from a withdrawn melancholy, that of the "unhappy consciousness" whose melancholy expresses itself as a theoretical and practical pessimism. What distinguishes the unhappy consciousness, according to Hegel, is its inability to reconcile within itself the diremption between the unchanging essence—the transcendent—and the

changeable, unessential individual (1948, 159–60). Faced with the alienness of its essence in relation to its own contingent individuality, consciousness experiences a profound melancholy. Its consciousness of its life, existence, and activity can therefore only provoke "suffering concerning this existence and activity," insofar as it only experiences itself therein in its own nothingness as opposed to the essential. The melancholy to which Adorno appeals is, in contrast, a melancholy that "exhibits itself as critical in relation to phenomena" (2001, 188). Its revelation of the immanent transience of phenomena is at the same time a critique of what happens to these phenomena in the disenchanted world. The critical attitude of melancholy is revealed in its microscopic focus on worldly fragments, which it reads as ciphers (not symbols) of the possible redemptive transfiguration of phenomena. Rather than embracing the transcendent as their meaning, the fragments under the gaze of the melancholy attitude point to the transcendent as something that breaks through the spell of mere being. It is this utopian potential of melancholy that is the source of the enigmatic assertion in *Negative Dialectic* that "[n]o thought of transcendence is possible any longer except by way of transience; eternity does not appear as such but as refracted through the most transient" (1966, 353).[27] In order to make sense of this idea of melancholy as the key to the interpretive scheme of natural history, it is necessary to recall Adorno's adoption of the idea of "second nature" as a description of the congealed structures of late capitalist modernity. The "semblance of the natural" that such institutions generate is equivalent to the "truncation of possibility" (2001, 174). What attracted Adorno to the idea of natural history was its potential to work as a destruction of this semblance of second nature. The reading of phenomena as ciphers of transience revokes the disappearance of possibility in second nature, and equally important, it does so without ontologizing history, and thus it refuses to read phenomena as mere means to the ends of history.

Adorno tends to speak of this critique of the semblance of second nature, and the opening up of possibility, in terms of the recovery of nonidentity within the thinking of identity. The destruction of the semblance of second nature takes place within language as the critique of the identity of concept and thing. Nonidentity is not supposed to be another thing outside of conceptual language; it is rather the linguistic figure for the appearance of transcendence within immanence. Nonidentity appears in the difference between the *striving to say* identity, and what is actually said in an identifying judgment. This is why Adorno says that "nonidentity is the secret telos of identification, it is what is to be rescued in the latter" (1966, 152). What Adorno means here is that nonidentity is nothing other than the breach between the identifications of which something is currently capable and its realized identity that is held onto within language as (unsayable) possibility. What makes

critical interpretation possible is the surviving impulse within language itself to recover its ability to name. It is this impulse that allows it to reflect on the inadequacy of what can be said with concepts.

> The force that explodes the semblance of identity is that of thinking itself: the application of its "it is" shakes its nonetheless indispensable form. The cognition of nonidentity is dialectical also in the sense that it also identifies, more and otherwise than identity thinking. Nonidentity wants to say what something is, while identity thinking says what it falls under, of what it is an exemplar or representative, thus what it is not itself. (1966, 152)

It should be clear that the distinction between saying "what something is" as opposed to what it exemplifies is the difference between classifying things and naming them. Like the name, then, nonidentity represents the failure of identity; it is the difference between what the concept says and the awareness of the insufficiency of what it is able to say. But, to reiterate, it is not something that comes from outside conceptual thought. It emerges only through the process of philosophical writing that is the self-reflection of concepts. Adorno suggests that "in the reproach that the thing [*Sache*] is not identical to the concept there also lives the yearning of the latter, that it would like to be so." This yearning (*Sehnsucht*) of the concept is what drives the despairing exertion of philosophy to say the unsayable. The point of interpretation is to use this force to shatter the semblance of identity.

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4

Failed Outbreak I

Husserl

> No correction of an error of idealist epistemology would be possible without necessarily producing a new error.
>
> —Adorno, *Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*

Introduction

A fragment in Adorno's notebook, scribbled in May 1960, suggests a common thread for the entirety of his philosophical oeuvre. Adorno locates the source of this thread in a single childhood experience: "Since my earliest youth," he claims, "I knew that everything that I stood for found itself in a hopeless struggle with what I perceived as the anti-spirit incarnate (*das Geistfeindliche schlechthin*)—the spirit of Anglo-Saxon natural-scientific positivism" (2003b, 14). What Adorno saw in positivism was, in a literal sense, the withering of experience. The living context of communication with the world in language, the mutual enrichment of subject and object, had now given way to a scene of devastation: the living context usurped by the deathly dregs of life (1993a, 27). Adorno's interpretive strategy will be to try to use the experiencing subject to break out of the mutilated experience within the constituting subject. In practice, this will mean recovering the potential of cognitive concepts to work as a form of expression. This is what Adorno means when he talks of giving the concept a turn toward nonidentity (1966, 24). In his critique of Husserl, Adorno will argue that epistemological inquiry as such presupposes the narrowing of experience that, historically, inaugurates the constituting subject.

We cannot "step outside" the frame that governs what counts as genuine knowledge, the frame of epistemological inquiry, and reach across to recapture the subjugated elements that would make cognition whole. But what the negative dialectic—the "rational process of revision against rationality" (1973, 87)—will do is to drive epistemological concepts to the point where they express, through their innermost structure, the experience of diremption. In this way, epistemological concepts will disclose the experience of suffering that has become sedimented within them. Adorno's intention in his metacritique, then, is to coax epistemological concepts to express what is presupposed by their operation *as* epistemological concepts. Rather than simply subsuming experience as dismembered conceptual contents, the concept becomes a riddle the deciphering of which points to the historical world: it discloses the world in the form of spiritual experience.

Adorno will have much to criticize in the way Husserl tries to recover pretheoretical experience. There is a denial of mediation in the phenomenologist's appointed task of description, similar to the illusion that permeates empiricism. This, in fact, is the constitutive error of epistemology. Adorno will claim that there can be no bare description of experience without at the same time drawing on categories that disrupt its immediacy; and so the subject must be active even in the effort to "describe" what is before it. The very attempt to *describe* an experience, in the medium of the classificatory concept, corrupts it. The true dialectician must be aware of this betrayal by her language, and must force language to work against its tendency to emasculate experience. The task for dialectic will be to use language—concepts—to create a force field, where a genuine spiritual experience will resonate in the frictions created among its components. What Adorno calls the rescue of the rhetorical moment in thinking points to the self-conscious employment of the resources of language to recover the cognitive potential of the moment of expression (1966, 66). Again, however, it needs to be stressed that this will take place *within* the classificatory concept, not by leaping outside of it.

Spiritual experience takes off from the insight that the objectivity of cognition requires more, not less of the subject (1966, 50). Without this strengthening of the subjective moment, philosophical experience "wastes away" (*verkümmert*). What a subjectively strengthened philosophy is aiming at, as Adorno puts it in an oft-cited phrase, is "the full, unreduced experience in the medium of conceptual reflection" (p. 25). In Adorno's handwritten notes for his lectures on negative dialectic in the winter semester of 1965, this phrase ends in a colon, followed by the words (in quotation marks) *geistige Erfahrung*—"spiritual experience" (2003a, 114). *Geistige Erfahrung* rescinds the dissolution of experience in epistemological inquiry by using the subject to recover the expressive element of epistemological concepts. The historical

experience sedimented in those concepts, Adorno believes, is the self-mutilation of the subject. As we shall see, the argument turns on the notion of givenness. By bringing the experience buried in epistemological concepts to expression, dialectic, as Adorno puts it, makes those concepts work as "a piece of unconscious history writing" (1970a, 47).

The Husserlian Outbreak

In a telling passage in his *Metacritique of Epistemology*, originally composed in 1934–37, Adorno ascribes to Husserl, together with Bergson (and also Gestalt theory), the desire to restore metaphysics with non-metaphysical, which here equates to "scientific," means. This is unpacked as follows:

> What is announced in these efforts is the memory, opposed to classificatory thinking, that the concept is not external and contingent in relation to the thing, something arbitrarily produced by abstraction, rather the concept, in Hegelian terms, expresses the life of the thing itself, and that more can be experienced [*erfahren*] about that life through the immersion [*Versenkung*] in the individuated item than by recourse to everything else that the thing resembles in this or that respect. (1970a, 121–22)

Husserl's phenomenology, as Adorno reads it, is set up from the beginning as a form of philosophical resistance to the withering of experience. The key term here is immersion—*Versenkung*. Rather than generating a universal by way of the abstraction of a fungible property, Husserl wants the universal to encapsulate the "life" or the essence of the thing. Adorno believed that Husserl's goal was a form of philosophy that generated content through its receptive stance toward its objects (1966, 57). A particular *geistige Erfahrung* came to Husserl's mind (as Adorno puts this elsewhere in *Negative Dialectic*), which should be able to show forth (*herausschauen*) the essence from out of the particular (p. 21). As opposed to generalized abstraction, Husserl opens up the possibility of another kind of knowing. In the cognitive encounter made possible within phenomenology, consciousness would attempt to immerse itself in the particular, hoping to coax a general insight from a concentrated attention toward the thing. Instead of prizing off general features shared with similar things, in the manner of the classificatory concept, the phenomenologist seeks to read the essence out of a single experience.

In the 1965–66 lectures on negative dialectic, Adorno goes into more detail on his own relationship with the Husserl/Bergson generation. Referring to this generation as his spiritual forerunners ("*meine geistigie Eltern*"), Adorno

asserts that the interest of philosophy in the nonconceptual was present in an "extraordinarily intensive" way in their work. Adorno goes on to state that Bergson and Husserl

> have both in their way, and both in a completely different way, announced the interest of philosophy in something that for its part is not a classificatory concept—incidentally both under the compulsion of the same situation, that is to say both in resistance [*Widerstand*] against the total dominance of causal-mechanical thinking, and the unsatisfactory aspect that causal mechanical thinking necessarily brings with it as concerns the intention of comprehension [*die Absicht des Begreifens*]. (2003a, 106)

This is the statement of the outbreak attempt (*Ausbruchsversuch*) in Husserl (and Bergson). It is clear from this passage that Adorno identifies strongly with the spirit of Husserl's attempted outbreak. The focal point of the Husserlian outbreak, for Adorno, is the critique of empiricist naturalism and its alleged reduction of the meaningfulness of what is given in experience. To properly understand the import of Adorno's metacritique of Husserlian phenomenology, we will have to distinguish the following moments: (1) Adorno fully identifies with the Husserlian attempt to break out of causal-mechanical conceptuality. But, (2) the outbreak cannot be successful in the terms in which Husserl tries to execute it. However, (3) this failure is not a result of epistemological errors or infelicities in Husserl's account; it is rather a result of the dependence of the epistemological project on conditions external to it (ultimately on the historical process of disenchantment). Consequently, (4) the outbreak can and must be executed solely as the self-reflection of epistemology itself, as the self-awareness of its dependence on conditions that determine the sense of its concepts. To try to break out of classificatory thinking by constructing *another* epistemological project would only serve to reveal once again the conditions that govern the necessary failure of that project. According to Adorno, this is exactly what happens in Husserl's phenomenology. Husserl seeks to clear away all the theoretical obfuscations accumulated in the epistemological tradition in order to begin anew, returning to the original contact with the given as it presents itself in experience. Adorno will try to show that Husserl succeeds only in replicating the reduced experience of the classificatory concept. Adorno's metacritique is therefore phenomenology's own self-reflection, which wrests the truth about experience from phenomenology in and through its very failure to say what it wants to say.

In the 1960–61 lectures on ontology and dialectic, Adorno relates the outbreak attempt to a sense of the concept of the subject as registering a confinement of thinking, and as being something "merely fabricated" (*bloß*

Gemachtes), a mere product of culture (2002, 189). What motivates the outbreak is the desire to get out of this "magic circle" by returning to the immediacy of the things themselves. This could be filled in as follows: certain intellectual capacities that allow for the classification of the object in terms that further the human interest in the control and instrumental application of nature, gradually get split off from their embeddedness within the cognitive experience of the subject as a whole, and get taken up into the operational logic of metasubjective (i.e., social) institutions. Over time, the growth of these institutions and their instrumental logic begins to react back on the subject, circumscribing the sense of what counts as cognitively significant experience. The experiencing subject now gets transformed, reduced, to the constituting subject. The sense of confinement to which Husserl (according to Adorno) gives expression derives from the insight that the encounter with the object has been prestructured by this operational logic rooted in the need for the control of nature. Consequently, the cognitive significance of the object becomes determinable solely in the terms of causal-mechanical conceptuality.

Although it is never explicitly stated within it, Husserlian phenomenology can be turned toward an expression of this spiritual experience.[1] It is the skeptical dissolution of all types of cognitive experience that do not fit the scheme of the natural-scientific reduction that drives the crisis of experience, as Husserl sees it. For Adorno, of course, this is simply a consequence of the historical process of diremption. But the important thing here is the fact that Husserl's philosophy registers acutely and faithfully the experience of disenchantment incumbent on the process of diremption. This is what motivates the breakout attempt from the congealed structures that have driven a wedge between the subject-object encounter. Dallas Willard has provided an exemplary description of Husserl's breakout attempt in terms of its "restoration of the rich manifold of the objectivities of human existence."

> To the juggernaut of reductionism and nothing-but-ism arising from thinkers such as Galileo and Hobbes, Husserl replied (and showed) that by far the most of what *they* wished to deny or neglect as not truly being—or else to falsify in its essence by shoving it into the mind: all of that had its own right to existence, which could be fully demonstrated or observed in the proper circumstances. (2002, 70)

If Adorno's metacritique is to be defensible, it must show not only that (1) Husserl does not succeed in overcoming the natural-scientific reduction; it must also demonstrate that (2) this failure is due to Husserl's commitment to the epistemological project as a whole. Further, (3) it must show that the failure of the epistemological project derives from its dependence on the historical process of diremption. Adorno will show that the only way of getting

beyond the classificatory concept is by subverting it from within. The classificatory concept must be reflected through itself; the attempt to *describe* what is outside of causal-mechanical thinking *with* classificatory concepts will end up with the empty husk of the concept in its possession, not the richness of the nonconceptual.

LOGICAL ABSOLUTISM

Husserl's theory of logical validity counts as a form of logical absolutism, according to Adorno, because it insists on the absolute separation between logical validity and subjective thought processes. Husserl had developed his account in the *Logical Investigations* in opposition to the then prevalent psychologism, and its reduction of ideal-logical validity to real-causal necessity. Husserl wants to preserve the distinctive essence of logical validity from the natural-scientific reduction by separating the meaning of logical validity from empirical processes. It is, for Husserl, primarily the indubitability and aprioricity of logical truth that secures its irreducibility to the status of empirical-natural facts. In the *Prolegomena*, the separation of ideal validity and empirical reality reaches its culmination in the assertion of the "eternal" nature of truth, that "[truth] is an idea, and as such atemporal [*überzeitlich*]" (1913a, 128). Logical validity, for Husserl, must be conceived as ideally independent of the natural constitution of the human species, and indeed of any process that is subject to a temporal development encompassing genesis and transformation (p. 120). In the first investigation, Husserl describes the ideality of species-specific meanings in the same way as exempt from the temporal process (1913b, 100–101). Meanings, Husserl asserts, constitute a class of "universal objects." Husserl interpreters have noted in these passages a slippage towards a version of Platonist idealism. Dan Zahavi asserts that the distinction between the ideal and the real appears to be "so fundamental and urgent" to Husserl that his critique of psychologism occasionally lapses into the Platonist assertion that the validity of ideal principles are independent of anything actually existing (2003, 9). Similarly, Elisabeth Ströker has referred to the "all-too-simple opposition between ideal-objective, timelessly valid truth in itself and its merely subjective apprehension in fleeting psychical acts" (1993, 38). Adorno had also articulated the suspicion that Husserl's theory is essentially a form of "Platonic realism" (1970a, 66). But what makes Adorno's interpretation particularly insightful is that it refuses to read Husserl's lapse into Platonism as a mere "mistake." Husserl, Adorno suggests, is effectively forced into the opposition between natural-scientific reductionism and a Platonist hypostatization of logical validity by the very presuppositions of epistemological inquiry, presuppositions that structure the meaning of Husserl's concepts. Far from being a mistake, the

lapse into Platonism stems from Husserl's rigorous and thorough development of the outbreak attempt through to its ultimate conclusions. As Adorno puts this, "the more that contradictions come forth in [Husserl's] philosophy as unreconciled, the more light falls on their necessity" (1970a, 55). Consequently, the "unfolding of contradictions that is unconscious of itself" approaches truth—the truth about epistemology.

Adorno's key argument is that Husserl's commitment to the presuppositions of epistemological inquiry is evidenced by his conception of truth as immediacy, or givenness: the bare presence of the object, uncontaminated by the pretheoretical reactions and conceptions of the subject. Because he shares this epistemological presupposition, Husserl, against his intentions, is bound to end up with a view of the essence of logic that simply reflects the structure of alienation: the spiritual capacities of the subject confront it as an independent force operating independently of the actual thoughts of real subjects. In wresting this truth from Husserl's untruth, Adorno will make Husserlian phenomenology accessible as a form of spiritual experience, through the revelation, *within* the movement of phenomenology itself, of its dependence on its social-historical context.

Husserl's attempt to break out of the reductivism of natural-scientific thinking by returning to the truth of subjective immanence turns out to be an impossible attempt to marry the idealist notion of subjective constitution with the positivist notion of immediacy. It is this fundamental characterization that drives Adorno's identification of the various "phenomenological antinomies" in Husserl. Phenomenology, Adorno argues, becomes intelligible as an attempt to break out of the "prison of the immanence of consciousness" by means of the very same categories with which idealist analysis had inaugurated the realm of the immanence of consciousness (1970a, 193). Consequently, and against its own intentions, phenomenology ends up reproducing all the categories of subjective semblance against which it was mobilized, entrenching that immanence in the very effort to overcome it (p. 194).

Husserl's outbreak attempt is guided by an important insight into what Adorno calls "conceptual fetishism" (1970a, 196). Husserl sets out to clear away the pre-prepared concepts that clutter and obfuscate the act of meaning in which logical laws become present. This return to the meaning of experience is the positive moment in phenomenology. But this insight cannot push beyond the causal-mechanical concept because it is assimilated into a conception of truth as immediacy. Here is Adorno's statement of this criticism.

> Precisely the claim of freshness and theoretical impartiality, the clarion call "to the things themselves," derives from an epistemological norm: the positivist one, which limits thinking to the technical process of abbreviation, so to speak, and ascribes the substance of

> knowledge solely to that which exists without the addition of thinking, and which indeed boils down to the most meager, most abstract results. (p. 131)

Joined to the idealist premise that the problem of knowledge must begin from the standpoint of the immanence of consciousness, Husserl's theory ends up with a formulation of spiritual being in itself, essence as a form of givenness *sui generis*. What Husserlian phenomenology amounts to, therefore, is the "transfer of positivism into Platonic realism" (p. 132). In the first book of the *Ideas*, Husserl had of course claimed that "if 'positivism' amounts to the grounding of all sciences, absolutely without presupposition, on the 'positive,' that is to say, what is grasped in an originary way, then we are the genuine positivists" (1922, 38). This is not empty polemic on Husserl's part. It reflects the shared commitment to a vision of truth as the pure presence of the object, purified of how it is taken up, worked on by a subject.[2] Once the commitment to an idea of truth as givenness is accepted, Adorno believes, the elimination of the experiencing subject has already been incorporated into the understanding of cognition. It is because of its commitment to the epistemologically crucial notion of givenness that Husserlian phenomenology finds itself unable to execute the outbreak other than through a reification of the spiritual capacities of the subject. Husserl's logical absolutism brings to expression, faithfully and accurately, the self-alienation of the subject resulting from the process of disenchantment. The mutilation of the subject that occurs within this process, its reduction to a passive observer of regularities in nature, here finds its way to expression in Husserl's depiction of the laws of thinking as alien to the subject. The subject no longer recognizes itself, its own essence, in the rigidified structures that now wholly determine its interaction with objects. Cognitive structures, then, have now become wholly severed from the experiencing subject.

The consequence of Husserl's commitment to the epistemological notion of givenness, Adorno claims, is a residual concept of truth. The approach toward the object proceeds by way of the removal of subjective experience. In all bourgeois (or modern) philosophy, including Husserl, Adorno claims that

> [t]ruth appears as what is "left over," after one has subtracted the expenses of the process of manufacture, the labor wage so to speak; in short after one has left out what in the vulgar language of the science that has given itself over to positivism is called "subjective factors." Whether thereby that substantiality of cognition, the fullness and animation of its object has not been cut away, is indifferent to a consciousness that, with the unchangeable and the indissoluble, possesses the surrogate of the experience which disintegrates within classificatory categories. (1970a, 76–77)

This is where phenomenology proves its inability to extricate itself from the assumptions of epistemological inquiry. The question of how what is valid as existing "in itself," independently of the subject, can be encountered within subjective thought is, as Elisabeth Ströker has argued, the "nucleus of the epistemological problematic" (1993, 8). Adorno's critique of Husserl argues that this beginning point is not self-evident; it is the legacy of a historical process that has striven to eliminate the activity of the experiencing subject from the determination of the cognitive significance of the object. The object is already prestructured by this historical process, as evidenced in the projection of truth as what is passively taken in, purely given. This establishes a commitment to a view of the object as unchangeable and static. In truth, as the reference to the process of manufacture is intended to suggest, genuine experience would be of the kind that was capable of using the subject to burrow underneath the immediacy in which the thing presents itself, as a fixed, unmoving thing. But this is only possible by allowing the engagement of the subject to dissolve the thing into the context that makes it the kind of thing it is, tracing the manifold threads of its dependence on its social-historical context. Husserl registers that this is impossible within the frame of epistemological inquiry: phenomenology ends up with the very same elimination of the experiencing subject.

Adorno's critique of the notion of immediacy or givenness culminates in the claim that logic is "not a being, but rather a process" (1970a, 81). Obviously the reification of logic made explicit in Husserl's Platonism is under attack here. But in describing logic as a "process," Adorno is also signaling that all efforts to grasp logic in the terms of epistemology must fail. What logic really amounts to is the structure of a type of interaction between subject and object. Adorno's argument is that, when it is detached from its instantiation in the history of interactions between the subject and its world, as happens in epistemological inquiry, it gets mistakenly projected into a being in itself. Exactly as happens when exchange value is projected as a property of things, rather than a product of specific social relations of production.[3] Adorno describes logical laws as emerging in the interaction between the "objective" elements comprised of the "compulsion of logical 'states of affairs,'" and the needs and tendencies of the thinking consciousness (p. 86). Adorno's point is that logic is centrally a way of interacting with the world, of (spiritually) working upon it. That is to say, it comprises a social activity. Husserl believes that he can segregate questions of this kind from epistemology through the distinction between the genesis of logical laws and their validity, that is, between the becoming and transformation of a representation of the world, and the epistemological inquiry into the grounding and justification of logic (1913a, 75, 206). While it is clear that Adorno does not want to deny that validity is irreducible to the history of its genesis,[4] it is also true that he does in fact want to undermine the idea that validity is determinable in absolute separation from genesis.[5]

The point that is fundamental to Adorno's argument here is that the genesis of logic encompasses a process that masks or distorts a correct understanding of the grounds of its validity. In the *Prolegomena*, Husserl believes himself to be faced with a choice that is in fact a product of that history, a history that has inserted itself into the structure of the epistemological concepts that condition this choice. Husserl wants to draw a boundary around the application of the concepts of natural-scientific thinking and its reduction of meaning to real-causal relations between elements. But because he accepts the misleading real-causal notion of genesis, *which is itself a product of those very epistemological concepts*, Husserl is effectively forced to secure the special meaning of logical validity as purified of all materiality, and hence of history. But now, as a result of this move, Husserl, as Brian O'Connor has demonstrated, is faced with the insuperable problem of explaining how the laws of logic can be justifiable to subjectivity (2004a, 141–42).[6] Those laws will either appear to the subject as justified, in which case they will appear as *its own* laws, as immanent to thinking, and hence as dependent on material thought processes. Or they must be passively accepted, and hence will appear as dogmatic, and contingent: *why* they are valid would be entirely inexplicable. Logic is here ascribed a compelling force (*Stringenz*), despite the fact that this force cannot become transparent in the thought of logic (Adorno 1970a, 64). What has gone wrong in this account, Adorno believes, is that it simply takes up unquestioningly the identification of material genesis and real-causal explanation. This is why Husserl must establish a strict demarcation, an "eternally unbreachable difference between ideal law and real law, between regulation through norms and causal regulation" (1913a, 68). It is because of this identification that validity becomes inexplicable, an alien force.

Adorno believes that the diremption into material occurrences that are subject to exclusively real-causal explication and the extraempirical validity of logic must itself be traced to a material process, but one that, because it is social and not psychological, resists the reductivism of real-causal explanation.

> [T]he implicit genesis of the logical is not at all psychologically motivated. It is a social comportment [*Verhalten*]. In logical principles, according to Durkheim, social experiences such as the ordering of relations between generations and of property sediment themselves, which claim priority over the being and consciousness of the individual. Obligatory and at the same time alienated from private interests, they come before the psychological subject as something that is valid in itself, coercive, but at the same time also contingent—just as occurs with Husserl, and against his will, in the case of the "principles in themselves." (1970a, 83)

When logic is understood as a social activity, Adorno is claiming, the specific nature of the validity that pertains to logic becomes clear, and at the same time it becomes possible to explain (by tracing its origin in a forgetting of history) the source of the misunderstanding of validity in logical absolutism. Husserl is right that validity is not reducible to psychological processes; however, its priority over the individual is borrowed from the normative force of social practice. It is this normative force that Husserl transfigures into an inexplicable validity "in itself."[7] Adorno's intention here is not to construct a sociologism that would merely replace psychologism with another reductive account of logical validity. What is really at stake here is that Adorno wants to call into question the absolute separation between validity and genesis, by making clear that that separation itself has a social-historical genesis, and hence cannot constitute a claim about the timeless essence of logic.[8]

I suggested earlier that Adorno's argument would set out to (1) demonstrate Husserl's failure to overcome the natural-scientific reduction, and (2) link this failure to the presuppositions of the epistemological project, as well as (3) show that the epistemological project is connected to the diremption of subject and object in history. Adorno believes that it is impossible to resolve the epistemological problematic whilst accepting its governing premise that, starting from "inside" the subject, one must show how it is possible reach down to the object as it is in itself. Husserl's ideal essences are therefore bound to be no more than empty abstractions. This is Adorno's answer to the first question about Husserl's failure to overcome the natural-scientific reduction: ideal objects turn out to be the same brute facts shorn of their experiential significance. The elimination of subjective moments from the object, Adorno believes, is already built into the governing assumptions of epistemological inquiry (in response to the second question). Furthermore, it is this presentation of the object as free of subjective moments that is inaugurated historically as the diremption of subject and object (this would be Adorno's response to the third question).

It is worth reiterating that Adorno does not want to question the validity of natural-scientific cognition, the presuppositions of which are made explicit in epistemological inquiry, insofar as it claims to reveal necessary features of the object. Adorno *does* claim that knowledge within the natural-scientific point of view does serve primarily instrumental or practical ends. However, it has to be true that, if it is to be successful, natural-scientific cognition must be able to reveal genuine (not illusory) characteristics of its objects. Adorno's point is really about what happens when the notion of cognitively significant experience gets defined exclusively from *within* the natural-scientific standpoint. What that standpoint cannot do, Adorno believes, is to reflect on its own experiential conditions of possibility. Articulating the experiential conditions of possibility of something is in fact precisely what Adorno means by

spiritual experience. The purpose of the self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*) of epistemology is to recover epistemology's context; it is not a causal history, but rather an elucidation of its meaning by tracing the reflections of its context on its surface. In spiritual experience, rather than constituting an isolated point in a causal process, the thing (or idea) becomes a center that radiates or expands outward in time and space. Hence, for Adorno, starting from the historical project of epistemology, one can reach the truth about the disenchantment of the world. But this requires a changed view of the subject, one that is not a passive observer of facts, but rather a subject that is able to use its own locus within the social-historical whole to probe the different dimensions of the object, filling in what was subtracted by the natural-scientific reduction. "To retrace [*nachvollziehen*] epistemology," Adorno claims, "to write its inner history, is in truth already an awakening" (1970a, 34). The use of this term signals the critical function of spiritual experience. Epistemology is defetishized, or in other words, it is read back into the context that marks its historical dependence. For Adorno, this is how the essence of epistemology is to be recovered and made available to the experiencing subject: epistemology becomes the center of an interpretive chain that forms the figure of alienation. To reveal epistemology in this way as spiritual experience, would be the genuine "concretion of the concept" that "slips through the classificatory net," not merely its surrogate (p. 112).

THE INTUITION OF ESSENCES

I argued earlier that although Adorno strongly identifies with what he calls Husserl's "outbreak" attempt from the causal-mechanical concept (what Husserl calls empiricist naturalism), he also believes that Husserl's outbreak fails because it does not get beyond the epistemological assumptions that drive the reduction of cognitive experience in the first place. In the previous section, I showed how Adorno applied this argument to Husserl's logical absolutism. I now want to show how the same issue arises in relation to the centrally important Husserlian notion of the intuition of essences (*Wesensschau*). A central goal of this elucidation will be to furnish support for Adorno's claim that the outbreak is possible only as the self-critique of the concept. Adorno believes that, because the diremption of subject and object has impressed itself into the very structure of the concepts we use, any and every attempt to overcome the epistemological problematic by making a "fresh start," by attempting to build a new method, will end up simply replicating the errors of epistemological inquiry. However, what philosophy *can* do is to reveal the dependence of epistemological inquiry on conditions that make it unable to resolve its own problems, conditions that, for Adorno, are eventually traceable

to the history of diremption and disenchantment. In dialectical critique, in other words, epistemology can be brought to self-consciousness: it will be made to express what it cannot say.

In the *Prolegomena*, first published in 1900, Husserl had already developed the elements of the *Wesensschau*—"intution of essences," that would come to be one of the defining features of his work. Husserl here addresses the issue of how one may reach a logical idea, or essence, beginning from an individual act of thinking, through a process of what he calls "ideating abstraction." In the second Investigation, Husserl develops this idea into a critique of empiricist and nominalist theories of abstraction. Husserl here speaks of the possibility of grasping ideal unities (Husserl calls them "species") through an abstraction from the perception of a single object (1913b, 107). The type of abstraction in question, Husserl takes pains to point out, is nothing like abstraction "in that inauthentic sense, which dominates empiricist psychology and epistemology." Husserl's example of ideating abstraction is a single species of color (redness), which may be particularized in a multiplicity of individual things (red objects). Husserl insists on an understanding of species as "objects" (*Gegenstände*), and asserts that they are to be made evident in the particular acts of meaning in which they appear (p. 110). Husserl's main intention in this section of the Investigations is to distinguish ideating abstraction from what Husserl takes to be reductive theories of abstraction prevalent in the empiricist tradition. Among these are theories that read abstraction as the picking out of a property that is shared among a group of objects, or nominalist theories that conceive a universal concept as representing or "standing in for" a series of particulars. Husserl is adamant that these sorts of theories distort the meaning in which universals are given to us. In short, they substitute unsupported theoretizations for the evidence of experience. Husserl's description of the act in which we become aware of a universal runs as follows

> We grasp the specific unity *red* directly, "itself," on the basis of a singular intuition of something red. We focus our glance on the moment of redness, but we execute a distinctive act, the intention of which is directed towards the "idea" or the "universal." Abstraction in the sense of this act is thoroughly distinguished from the mere observation or foregrounding of the moment of redness; in order to indicate this difference we have continually spoken of *ideating* or *generalizing* abstraction. (p. 223)

Adorno's reference to Husserl as one of his *geistige Eltern* (spiritual kin) is largely inspired by Husserl's efforts to resist the reductivism of empiricist and nominalist theories of abstraction. The unity of the species, for Husserl, is supposed to become available in the perception of a single object. The idea or

the universal is already present in the singular thing, and becomes discernible in a simple transition in the focus of intention. What Adorno saw in this theory was a recognition of the shortcomings of a theory of abstraction that focused on (1) the isolation of a common property through the *comparison* of a series of objects, followed by (2) the *subtraction* of all expressive features of those objects. The universal, in this case, is of course (in Kant's terms) similar to the universal of subsumptive or determinate judgment. Adorno believes that, just as when items are conceived as having an exchange value, they become fungible exemplars of that value (that is to say, they are replaceable by other items having the same value), so, when particulars are subject to determinate judgment, they become fungible exemplars of a concept (that is, they are instances of the "value" that is the common property in question). Adorno's perceived kinship with Husserl was based on what he saw as Husserl's insight into the corrosive effects of this type of abstraction when it begins to twist free of its (wholly legitimate) function as a form of cognition making possible the maximal control of nature, and sets itself up as standing in judgment on the validity of all cognitive experience. What is announced in Husserl's ideating abstraction, Adorno believes, is an interpretation of the universal as the essence of the particular, rather than a common property derived from comparison plus subtraction. To say that it is the essence of the particular is to say that it articulates what that particular means, rather than extracting what it has in common with other things. Adorno's argument against Husserl will try to show that, in order to make this critique work, ideating abstraction has to become something like spiritual experience. This means that the essence can only be culled by working *through* the series of conceptual abstractions, hence reconstructing the essence by the critique of the concept.

The suspension of the "natural attitude" that Husserl envisages in the *Ideas* is supposed to put out of action or "bracket" the theoretical assumptions, infused by a pernicious naturalist mentality, about what has standing as an element of the real, or objectivity. The natural attitude, Husserl asserts, is a "theoretical attitude" that structures the world according to certain assumptions about what experience is like (1922, 7). Thus the natural attitude possesses its own "objective province" (*Gegenstandsgebiet*), with its own mode of intuition or what Husserl calls "originary giving experience," which in the case of the natural attitude is "perception." The reach of experience, as defined by the natural attitude, is therefore circumscribed by the boundary of its objective province. Husserl can now argue that the assertion that all judgments require founding by (empirical) experience is a "speculative construction a priori" (p. 36). It results from a failure to reflect on the theoretical assumptions that constitute the realm of experience within the natural attitude. Hence the empiricist, for Husserl, has conflated a return to "the things themselves" with the demand that all cognition be justified by experience in the narrow sense

(p. 35). For Husserl, phenomenology is able to get access to the basic structures defining the natural attitude through the transformation of individual intuition into the intuition of essence, or, "ideation" (p. 10). The role of perception within the natural attitude (which empiricism mistakes as the whole sphere of experience) is therefore set within the broader sphere of a "seeing as such" that encompasses an intuition of essential structures.

Husserl's description of the narrowing of cognitively significant experience in empiricist naturalism strongly foreshadows the argument of the first chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Husserl portrays naturalist thinking as driven by a form of virulent skepticism. He argues that its desire to purify thinking of the hold of the idols of tradition, and superstition—of "coarse and refined prejudices of any kind"—has gratuitously constricted the types of experience that can legitimately enter into the realm of scientific discourse. Ideas, and essences have been consigned to the trash heap of history as one more form of superstition. Empiricist naturalism does not realize that, when it operates in this way, it is illegitimately using the criteria of cognitive significance applicable to one specific domain (that one governed by the natural attitude) as the yardstick with which to measure cognitively significant experience as such. Adorno (1972a) portrays this type of thinking as a form of a neurotic fear of contact, where naturalism (figuring as a corrupted form of Enlightenment) eliminates all possible traces of the mythic in a feverish effort to prevent contamination. The result is a severely castrated model of cognition. Here is Husserl's reading of the same process.

> [G]enuine science and the science of experience [*Erfahrungswissenschaft*] count as the same thing for the empiricist. "Ideas," "essences" as opposed to facts—what could they be other than scholastic entities, other than metaphysical ghosts? . . . The principal error of the empiricist argumentation lies in the fact that the basic demand for a return to the "things themselves" is identified, confused with the demand for the justification of all cognition through experience [*Erfahrung*]. (1922, 35)

What is common to the reading of naturalism (or "positivism," in the terms of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) in Husserl and Adorno is a claim about the destructive force of this type of thinking once it sets itself up as the arbiter of cognitively significant experience. In particular, what becomes impossible is the experience of the particular as bearing an "essence," an immanent universal that can be extrapolated from the interrogation of that experiential item. The difference between Husserl and Adorno is in fact all about how to get access to this essence. Whereas Husserl speaks of essences as present to a kind of "seeing" that turns its attention away from objects in the natural attitude,

Adorno believes that essence becomes accessible solely in the interpretive practice of dialectical critique, which uses the concepts of (to use Husserl's term) the natural attitude to construct an interpretive figure that allows those concepts to reveal the presuppositions lying behind their everyday functioning in propositional assertions. The "essence" that is in fact presupposed by the operation of those concepts in the natural attitude is for Adorno, of course, the structure of disenchantment.

By essence, Husserl means something like the necessary structure of an object. In the *Wesensschau* it is grasped in its "bodily" selfhood, *before* the concept sets about its work of dissecting and classifying what is before it (1922, 11). Essence itself simply means "that which is discovered as its 'what' in the self-authentic being of an individual" (p. 10).[9] Essences are not acquired by abstraction in the sense of the isolation of a common property, rather they become accessible in an attitude (*Einstellung*) toward experience that is able to distil universal qualities from the perception of individual things. What Husserl is able to do with the notion of *Wesenschau*, therefore, is to inaugurate a form of access to the deeper structures behind the natural-scientific organization of experience. Essences reveal themselves to a procedure of *immersion* in an experience, in other words they are read out of the particular, rather than culled from a procedure of comparative abstraction.

Thus far, I have been trying to draw out the "spiritual kinship" between Adorno and Husserl, centered on the idea of an attempted "outbreak" from the naturalist/positivist constriction of experience. Whereas, in Husserl, it is "intuition" that plays the role of counteractive to the classificatory concept, I suggested that in Adorno it is "spiritual experience" that takes on this task. I now want to return to the central points of difference in the method of the outbreak attempt in these two thinkers. My comments here should help to make clear why "spiritual experience" is in fact significantly different from Husserlian intuition, based on the problems Adorno saw in Husserl's attempted recovery of experience.

Husserl, Adorno argues, wants to break the spell of reification whilst remaining within the framework of science (1970a, 55).[10] However, as Adorno reads him, Husserl's outbreak does not succeed because he fails to execute the outbreak as a reflection of the inner contradictions and aporias of naturalism. Instead, Husserl wants to break out of empiricist naturalism by returning to what gives itself intuitively in experience, prior to all conceptual work on that experience. The breakout is therefore executed as a return to an original contact with the givennness of things prior to theory. For Adorno, this is precisely why it has to fail—because givenness is itself an epistemological construction. Because Husserl cannot get critical access to the structuring role of epistemological categories, his essences will simply replicate the ossified, isolated facts that pass for genuine experience in empiricist naturalism. Husserl, argues

Adorno, wants to "shatter" merely fabricated concepts that "cover" their objects (*Sachen*), and to dismantle theoretizations with the means of the critique of reason, so as to reveal what is actual, independently of the overdrawn (*überwuchernd*) terminological apparatus (p. 195). However, the *Sachen* of Husserlian phenomenology are themselves mere "cover images" of thought operations; they are "congealed labor" (p. 197). The illusion of immediacy is a result of the subtraction of the activity of thinking from the determination of the significance of things.

It is by revealing the impossibility of the phenomenological *Ausbruchsversuch* that Husserl, *malgré lui*, is able to capture the truth about thinking in its reified form. This is why idealism is "not simply untruth. It is the truth in its untruth" (1970a, 235). Adorno effectively uses Husserl's formulations to push them toward this confession of their own untruth. The point is not only to understand *that* Husserl fails, but also to see why he *had* to fail. And understanding this point will allow for the rescue of the truth in the untruth of phenomenology. Coming to grips with this conclusion will require giving Husserl's philosophy a twist toward what is revealed by the structure of epistemology. Epistemology cannot *say* this directly, but it will reveal it in the contradictions and aporias that disrupt and breach its striving to say what it means. Getting to the bottom of this will require unpacking the following dense passage

> Right into their uppermost formalisms, and above all in their shattering [*Scheitern*], [the frail concepts of epistemology] are to be rescued in that they are to be helped to self-consciousness against that which they mean from out of themselves [*von sich aus meinen*]. This rescue, the remembrance of suffering that has sedimented itself in the concepts, waits for the moment of their disintegration [*Zerfall*]. That moment is the idea of philosophical critique. This has no measure but the disintegration of semblance. (p. 47)

The "self-consciousness" of epistemological concepts to which Adorno refers denotes the awareness of the diremption of subject and object, which structures those concepts so that their content appears in terms of the notion of givennness. This is why Adorno claims that what they mean "from out of themselves," their classificatory function ("the strict dismemberment of consciousness into 'states of affairs' and their classification" [p. 135]), is distinguished from what they reveal: the "suffering," or the diremption that drains experience from the encounter between concept and world. Their "rescue," beyond their role in the coercive integration of particulars, is the "remembrance" of this suffering—the diremption of subject and object—that is revealed in pushing their antagonisms to the very limit of what they are able

to say. Philosophical critique brings these antagonisms to the surface by submitting epistemological concepts to (as Adorno says in *Negative Dialectic*) the "logic of disintegration." In their disintegration, these concepts begin to work as an expression of the experiential framework that makes epistemology possible—its origin in diremption. Directly under the passage quoted above, Adorno, in a trope on Marx's idea of a transformation rather than an interpretation of the world that is repeated at the beginning of *Negative Dialectic*, suggests that in this farewell to philosophy, "concepts come to a stop, and become images [*Bilder*]." The point here is that in the very failure of epistemological concepts, their "shattering," they begin to speak about the experience buried within them. They become more like images because they are now intelligible as a surface on which the whole becomes legible in the figure formed by the interpretation of its elements. In other words, in their disintegration, epistemological concepts make possible spiritual experience.

Adorno's claim that dialectical critique can reveal the buried presuppositions of epistemology by pushing its concepts to the point where they break down, informs the characterization of Husserl as the "unconscious but faithful historiographer of the self-alienation of thinking" (1970a, 70). This is the sense in which we can say that Husserl's outbreak attempt had to fail. In so far as the concepts of epistemology embody in their structure the suffering of diremption, one cannot use these concepts to get at something beyond or "outside" of this structure. Husserl's demarcation strategy fails because it runs up against the limits of what can be said with epistemological concepts. However (and this is central to Adorno's metacritique) in its very failure to get beyond epistemology, Husserl's outbreak attempt reveals that limit: it shows that disenchantment is the precondition of any inquiry that is properly "epistemological." The demarcation from the realm of the classificatory concept and its material does not, then, open up possibilities of experience beyond the concept. Instead, "ideas are left behind as the *caput mortuum* of the life that has been abandoned by spirit" (p. 92). What Husserl ends up with in eidetic intuition are simply the facts of naturalism minus their facticity, merely the shadows of the *tode ti* (p. 111).

SELF-REFLECTION AND NATURAL HISTORY

I argued that the thrust of Adorno's metacritique of Husserl comprises an attempt to rescue a truth in Husserl's philosophy from its own untruth. I said that the truth in question concerns disenchantment as the experiential precondition of epistemological inquiry. Husserl reveals the truth about epistemological concepts by showing what cannot be said in those concepts. Of course, in making good on this claim, Adorno will be demonstrating that the

outbreak attempt can be achieved as the dialectical critique of concepts. Adorno's reference to the moment of philosophical critique as waiting on the "disintegration" of concepts denotes precisely this movement in which concepts illuminate the very conditions that make it impossible for them to put experience into words. It is only as decaying fragments that epistemological concepts can be read as expressions of the truth about experience. Dialectical critique therefore rescues the ossified concepts of epistemology by reading them as ciphers that disclose a form of spiritual experience. Those concepts, that is to say, form a center from which, moving outward, it is possible to construct a whole that is nothing other than the total social-historical context immanent to the concept. As the faithful yet unconscious reflection of historical experience, phenomenology waits on dialectical critique to reconstruct the whole that was squeezed out of its concepts by recovering their expressive function within language. I now want to illustrate Adorno's procedure by looking more closely at a number of examples that Adorno focuses on in his metacritique of Husserl. The first two examples are read (by Adorno) as ciphers that already embody the truth about alienation as a consequence of disenchantment. The third will reveal the important role of the idea of natural history in Adorno's critical strategy.

Adorno makes much of two images in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* as revelations of the experience of alienation and the context of reification. The first image discussed is that of the "calculating machine" (1970a, 68–70). Husserl uses this example to establish that logical laws are not deducible from psychological processes. No one, Husserl wants to claim, would use arithmetical laws, instead of mechanical laws, to explain the way the machine functions. Similarly, logical laws should be ideally separable from the explanation of thought processes in humans. But this image reveals more than can be said within Husserl's epistemological categories. That the mathematical accuracy of the result and the causal-mechanical conditions of the functioning of the machine seem to be independent of one another, Adorno claims, is due to a "disregard of the construction of the machine." It is in the mind of the creator of the machine that logical laws and causal mechanical processes are reconciled. It is in this, on first glance, minor lacuna in the argument that Husserl's thinking discloses, unconsciously, an awareness of the nature of alienation.

> The unmediated dualism of reality and mathematics originates historically in a forgetting, the withdrawal [*Rückzug*] of the subject. Now that goes not only for the machine, but also for humanity itself, in so far as its thinking fragments into logical and psychological moments. The subject carries over into ontology its own fissure into a disciplined social functionary and a seemingly isolated individual existence. The logical moments, alienated from the subject, represent

> the encroaching context [*das Übergreifende*]. In thinking and acting he is more than just himself. He becomes the bearer of the social system and measures himself at the same time against the reality that has priority over the split off for-itself of his subjectivity. (p. 69–70)

Husserl's calculating machine example illustrates precisely the self-alienation of the subject that is the root of the process of reification. The historical situation of alienation is presented in terms of social forms that begin to take on a logic of their own, and react back on the subject as a controlling instance. The social-historical process is here represented by the "congealed labor" of the manufacturer of the calculating machine. The subject that "draws back" from the machine after aligning the causal-mechanical process and logical states of affairs has as its social counterpart the historical movement that splits the subject into formal laws that, embedded in institutions, begin to operate independently, and the experiencing subject for whom those laws seem like a foreign imperative. Because the movement of self-alienation is forgotten, extirpated from consciousness, the subject's own thought constructions—logical laws—now appear as entirely severed from thinking. Those constructions form a second nature that is immune to the penetration of critical reflection. Hence the subject simply accepts them as valid "in and for themselves." This, of course, is precisely the contemplative stance toward experience that Lukács penetratingly dissects in *History and Class Consciousness*. Adorno is arguing that Husserl's account of logic validity reflects this loss of autonomy of the individual, and its transformation into a mere executor of operations the logic of which it neither controls nor influences. It might be asked at this point why Adorno puts so much weight on an (at first glance) seemingly trivial example. After all, Husserl *is* only using this as an illustration to establish a particular (though important) argument about nondeducibility. But it is precisely at these points, Adorno believes, that the text will disclose more than its concepts will allow to be said. Husserl's example here becomes an element in an image, and as such it already points beyond itself to the experience that makes it possible.

The second example occurs when Husserl raises the question of how mathematical disciplines, that is, disciplines in which the sheer complexity and complication of mathematics, in excess of any single subjective apprehension, can arise (1970a, 71). Husserl refers to these mathematical disciplines as ones in which true "spires" of thought are created. The explicit function of this illustration is to underline the fact that the achievements contained in mathematics cannot be replicated in each operation that makes use of them; there must therefore be a certain independence of mathematical procedures in relation to subjective thinking. But again, Adorno claims, the illustration reveals more than it says about the entwinement of epistemological thinking with reification.

> Those "spires" are artefacts that present themselves as though they were natural. Similarly, to stay in the image, old stonework, the social origin and purpose of which has been forgotten, is perceived as a part of the landscape. But the spire is not a rock, although shaped out of the stone that gives the landscape its color. Husserl acknowledges [*erkennt*] the reification of logic in order to "appropriate" [*hinnehmen*] it, as is distinctive of his method overall, that is, to intentionally forget once more what has been forgotten by logic. (p. 72)

What is "forgotten" here is that logical laws are traceable, finally, to a thought process, an interaction of subject and object that undermines their projection as pure beings in themselves independent of the subject. Because epistemology must treat its object as an other to thought, its very structure "forgets" or is unconscious of this founding moment. But Husserl's image—the spires that were originally products of human subjects but are now perceived as inert parts of the landscape, no different from an escarpment or ridge—reveals this forgotten history, but only for a brief moment. The truth about epistemology lights up temporarily in this image, only to be extinguished, covered over once again by the weight of epistemological concepts.

The final image that I want to examine follows a discussion in which Adorno describes phenomenology as the "system in decay" (1970a, 215). Adorno intends here to locate phenomenology within the same historical moment that forms the background for *Minima Moralia*, and which Adorno characterizes in general terms as the decline of the bourgeois order (that is, the world of pre-twentieth century capitalism). Adorno compares this to the first (optimistic) idealist systems that were conceived in response to the destruction of the Christian cosmos. To speak of phenomenology as the *system* in decay is to draw out this connection between idealism and the bourgeois world; phenomenology is the expression of this world at the moment of its decline. Phenomenology, Adorno claims, is the attempt to revivify the idea of totality from the "ruins" (*Trümmer*) of this world. The transition from the highpoint of the bourgeois order to its decay is mirrored in the transformation from the active position of the subject within Kantian idealism through its role in object constitution to its functioning as pure receptivity in phenomenology.[11]

It is this reading of phenomenology that allows Adorno to interpret Husserl through the lens of natural history. The concepts of Husserlian idealism are understood as the decaying elements of a world that is passing away. Adorno is here following the methodological guidelines of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book. Rather than transfiguring the concepts of phenomenology as symbols, they appear, as in allegory, as the ruins of the world. It is in Husserl's philosophy that this world comes to expression *as* transitory and in decline, just

as, for Benjamin, the German Mourning Play gave expression to the end of the world of the Reformation. Adorno's reliance on the idea of natural history becomes explicit in the following passage:

> As in the *Naturalienkabinett*[12] relicts from whom life has slipped away are collected as possessions and put on display, the "nature" of which means, allegorically, history that has passed away and nothing more, and its history is nothing other than merely natural transience—so also phenomenological seeing has, on its "meanderings" [*Wanderungen*],[13] to do with petrified facts, ossified syntheses, the "intentional life" of which reflects only the pallid light of what is real-as-passed-away. (1970a, 219)

This tortuous sentence manages to incorporate the central theme of natural history—the passing of nature and history into one another—into an image that depicts phenomenology's own historical role as registering within its categories the elements of a decaying world. Adorno's point here seems to be that, like allegory, phenomenology organizes its material in such a way that it is able to bring to expression, in particularly acute form, the nature of an epoch and its governing self-understandings at the moment of its historical disappearance. By extracting objects from existence and historical change, the phenomenological gaze mortifies them. Here, the ideals of the bourgeois era appear as true relics, historical creations that have petrified. It is in this moment of historical decline that the truth of the ideas of an epoch can be rescued for the present. As historical artifacts, the theoretical creations at the decline of the bourgeois age release their innermost utopian impulses to an insistent inspection that probes their contextual significance. According to Adorno, it is through its motivation to rescue a form of cognition that would express the life of the thing, through immersion in that thing, that phenomenology speaks to the needs of the present.

The natural history motif culminates in the third image, Husserl's Panopticon. Etymologically carrying the sense of a perspective that "sees all," the specific sense here is of a displayed collection of curiosities, a chamber of wax figures. Here is Husserl's development of this image.

> Taking a leisurely stroll in the Panopticon, we meet on the staircase an unknown woman waving in a friendly manner. It is a mannequin, which deceives us for a moment. So long as we are caught up (*befangen*) in the illusion, we have a perception that is the same as any other. We see a woman and not a mannequin. (1913b, 442–43)

Adorno's interest in this example stems from the manner in which it seems to capture the artificiality of the outbreak attempt in phenomenology. The phe-

nomenologist, Adorno asserts, is *befangen*, caught up or confined in the illusion (1970a, 220). Husserl does not succeed in twisting free of the theoretizations that constrict genuine experience. Instead the phenomenologist "rests content with the world of things, in association not with women, but rather with mannequins" (p. 221). The example is itself a metaphor for the failure of phenomenology's outbreak attempt: it satisfies itself with the semblance of the real, the fabricated world that passes before the phenomenological gaze. For the phenomenologist, Adorno asserts, the world appears as a *Guckkastenbühne*, or proscenium theater (p. 220). What is foregrounded here is the sense of separation from the world through the confinement of subjectivity, where experience enters as if through a fissure. The phenomenological reduction is for Adorno an acknowledgment of this confinement, as it confirms the willingness of the phenomenologist to rest content with the semblance of experience that can be held securely as a possession.

What Adorno's "metacritique" of Husserl tries to show is that the "outbreak" from the constituting subject is not possible by demarcating the classificatory concept, but must be achieved by working (immanently) against it, by dismantling it from within. The demarcation of a sphere of intuition that extends genuine knowledge beyond naturalism does not get hold of more than watered down copies of natural-scientific brute facts. Husserlian phenomenology was motivated by a genuine spiritual experience, that what is essential about a state of affairs is not reached by the covering concept, the unifying characteristic [*Merkmaleinheit*] of several states of affairs (1970a, 102). The insight in Husserl is that "causal-mechanical and classificatory explanation does not penetrate to the center of the object, that it forgets what is most valuable [*das Beste*]." But despite his best efforts—and not because there is something in his theory that needs to be "corrected"—Husserl is unable to grasp essence otherwise than in the terms of the classificatory concept. Adorno's solution will be to reinscribe truth within the classificatory concept as a "force field" (p. 79). The static idea of truth must be replaced by a dynamic interplay of subjective and objective moments, so that logic becomes a process rather than an inert being. "Dialectic," as Adorno puts this, "is a consequence of the self-critique of logic" (p. 81). Dialectic will dismantle the starting point of epistemology, the analysis of the form of cognition without consideration for the concrete, determinate content (the form which in Husserl gets projected as logical being) by "driving all epistemological categories beyond themselves." When it is able to do this, dialectic is the "medium of truth" in an undialectical system (p. 132).

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5

Failed Outbreak II

Bergson

> The world that our senses and our consciousness habitually acquaint us with is now nothing more than the shadow of itself; and it is cold like death.
>
> —Henri Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*

Spiritual Affinities

Unlike in the case of Husserl, Adorno did not devote an extensive study to Henri Bergson. Usually, when Bergson is mentioned, it is in the same context as Husserl.[1] Sometimes, Bergson is treated as representative of the pre–World War I generation (together with Husserl, Simmel, Dilthey), and its search for a philosophy driven by the content, in opposition to the causal-mechanical concept (1966, 57). The substance of the scattered remarks on Bergson seems to be a rumination on a single theme. The concern is generally Bergson's attempt to do justice to the nonconceptual by consecrating another form of knowledge, which Bergson calls "intuition," that works *outside* of the classificatory concept. Adorno asserts (here mirroring his critique of Husserl) that this dualistic solution makes intuition abstract, and that the only way to reach the nonconceptual is to work through the causal-mechanical concept. The critical nature of these remarks should not distract from the evident spiritual affinity between Adorno and Bergson. In fact, and just as in the case of Husserl, they are evidence that Adorno came to his idea of negative dialectic only by working through what was problematic in Bergson's account. The

affinity with both Bergson and Husserl concerns the attempted recovery of spiritual experience. In his 1965–66 lectures, Adorno elucidates this relationship with uncharacteristic clarity.

> [E]nlightenment, precisely as the standpoint of the progressing consciousness, in so far as it pulls up short before the concept of spiritual experience [*geistige Erfahrung*] or tries to extinguish it as something that is uncertain and unclear, it comes to a stop in the realm of mere domination, of mere control over the nonconceptual [*Unbegriffenes*]. This is the insight that Bergson has expressed in our time, and in opposition to the infinite coercion of the positive sciences and the reified world, the abstract quality and rigidity of which is commensurate with this coercion. (2003a, 126–27)

Bergson, Adorno is claiming, wants to recover spiritual experience against its usurpation by abstract conceptuality. Adorno's critique of Bergson concerns simply *how* this project is put into practice. But the goal—the outbreak from the constituting subject—remains the same, with Bergson as with Husserl. A closer look at Bergson's attempted outbreak, then, should provide some important illumination as regards Adorno's own solution.

Adorno makes clear that those two "large scale" outbreak attempts executed with "extraordinary energy" (he is talking about Husserl and Bergson) must be regarded as having failed (2003a, 110). However, the *task* of the outbreak remains as a legacy of those philosophers. Adorno suggests that the "tremendous force" (*ungeheure Gewalt*) that Bergson exercised on the culture of his time is directly attributable to the "collective needfulness" to which his works responded (p. 111). These statements express quite nicely the nature of Adorno's relationship to Bergson, which was one of a profound intellectual kinship within which there was an important disagreement about the execution of the philosophical project. I want first to substantiate this claim by discussing the most important theoretical innovations that Adorno takes over from Bergson and makes central to his idea of spiritual experience. I will then try to outline the central elements of Bergson's outbreak attempt. Along the way, my central goal will be to make sense of Adorno's reading of Bergson, both in terms of Adorno's conception of Bergson's philosophical project, and also in terms of Adorno's criticisms of that project.

The first thing to note is the linking of the possibility of critical reflection with memory. Precisely the same insight underlies Adorno's claim that "all reification is a form of forgetting" (1994, 417).[2] It should now be clear that it was this idea that was behind the critique of reification in Husserl's phenomenology. What was "forgotten" in epistemology, but briefly resuscitated in Husserl, was the awareness of epistemological categories as structured by

diremption, the separation of subject and object, form and content. Therefore memory works here as critical reflection, as thought's consciousness of its own experiential conditions of possibility. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno, after identifying spiritual experience with the "opposite of reification," goes on to specify it further as "what always lives on solely as thought and memory" (1951, 52–3). The way of access to spiritual experience, therefore, is to work through concepts until, in a flash of recollection, the hidden memory of their dependence on conditions external to them is wrested from their structure. This, as we saw, is the point at which concepts become "conscious." Adorno usually refers to this moment as *Selbstbesinnung*, or self-awareness, self-reflection. Adorno's reference to negative dialectic as the "reading of the entity as a text of its becoming," points to this practice of using memory to gain a critical distance from the thing (1966, 62). It is essential that we not understand this, however, on the model of external critique, that is, the bringing to bear of external, "subjective" considerations in the evaluation of the object. It is important to recall here that memory, for Bergson, "represents precisely the point of intersection between mind [*l'esprit*] and matter" (1939, 5). What we will need to make sense of, therefore, is that memory is a form of critical reflection that works by a penetration, or *immersion* into the object. This, of course, would be a concise definition of dialectical critique.

I will return to this below, but it becomes (I hope) at least *prima facie* plausible if we consider, like Bergson, that perception (the other side of the divide from pure memory) can be understood as a *selection* of features of the object based on what is instrumentally useful for the agent. This is the second important theoretical innovation that will figure largely in Adorno's philosophy.[3] One of the founding insights of *Matter and Memory* is the questioning of the standard philosophical assumption that perception has a "purely speculative" interest, that it aims at "pure knowledge" (1939, 24). The practical interest of the cognitive faculty, for Bergson, guides perception toward those features of the object that are potentially useful. Hence the representation of matter "results from the elimination of that which is of no interest to our needs and more generally to our functioning" (p. 35). This point grounds the important thesis that "conscious perception does not attain to the entirety of matter" (p. 74). In fact, it is habitual memory that selects the features in perception that are useful in practical action. But if, as Bergson claims, "to perceive consciously means to choose," to omit and ignore some features of the given and prioritize others on the basis of a practical discernment, "pure" perception must be said to exist more in principle than in fact, since all perception is cut to the specifications of habitual memory (pp. 31, 48). At one point in the lectures on philosophical terminology of the summer 1962 semester, Adorno traces the central thesis concerning the "domination of nature" to this innovation in Bergson's philosophy.

> Scientific comportment [*Verhalten*] [is] the opposite pole to immediate experience . . . , it is itself also something mediated, namely through the ends of the divisions of labor, and, as Henri Bergson above all has demonstrated with the greatest of astuteness in his analyses, it is mediated through the ends of the domination of nature, of technique [*Technik*] above all, so that science does not at all represent the immediate or the ultimate. (1973, 90)

It is striking that Adorno here links the most recognizable thesis in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* with Bergson's reading of selective perception, the practical origin of habitual cognition.[4] Instrumental reason, the form of cognition that is behind the domination of nature, would therefore be intelligible as the roughhewing of what is given so that only those elements suggesting possible lines of practical activity are foregrounded. Bergson develops this point into a critique of empiricism prefiguring that of Husserl.

> What one ordinarily calls a *fact* is not reality such as it would appear to an immediate intuition, but an adaptation of the real to the interests of practice and to the exigencies of social life. . . . The error [of empiricism] is not to value experience too highly, but on the contrary to substitute for true experience, that which originates in the immediate contact of the mind with its object, an experience that is disarticulated and in consequence, no doubt, distorted [*dénaturée*]; arranged at any rate for the greatest convenience of action and of language. (1939, 203–204)

The object, in its experiential richness, is always kept at a certain distance from the subject because of the operation of a mechanism of selection that filters experiential items based on their usefulness. The work of habit builds up typical schemes for filtering perception, and these schemes work automatically, that is, unconsciously, in any given situation. Bergson here asserts the thesis that nothing can count as a "fact" that is not already mediated by the subject's conceptual understanding, but he adds to this the all-important caveat that those mediating structures have as their basis what is instrumentally useful. Adorno would of course want to criticize Bergson's explication of the intelligence in terms of biological evolution.[5] Adorno interprets natural-scientific thinking as a historical product, a structure that develops in the course of the interchange of human beings with nature. Over time, this structure begins to twist free of its original purpose in securing human self-preservation through the control of nature. It gradually embeds itself within social life as its dominant institutional logic, and, in the shape of the constituting subject, begins to function as an authority that determines the boundaries of

legitimate cognition.[6] Despite these important differences, Bergson's attempt to circumscribe the intelligence as a strategy rooted in the evolutionary life process, and Adorno's view of conceptual cognition as the outcome of a history of subject-object interactions both tell a strikingly similar story about natural-scientific thinking as a dependent form of cognition that is unaware of itself as such.

In addition to this attempt to circumscribe conceptual cognition, there is, finally, a profound similarity in the terms in which the constriction of experience in natural-scientific thinking is interpreted and described. This is evident, first of all, in the way both Bergson and subsequently Adorno describe mathematization, and number, as central to the process of concept formation. For Bergson, the concept of number is central to the founding distinction between space and *durée* as two forms of what Bergson calls multiplicity. Number is integral to space which, following Kant, Bergson takes to be a schematization of the world rather than an inherent property of things. In terms of number, Bergson argues, multiplicity is organized as a series of homogeneous entities spread across an empty space. It is, argues Bergson, a collection of discontinuous points marked by empty intervals. According to Bergson, the homogeneous reality of space and its organization in terms of number is at the root of the capacity to count, to abstract, "and perhaps even to speak" (1908, 74). This implies that the fine dissections of reality that are the basis of conceptual classification are themselves made possible by the homogeneous milieu structured by mathematized space.

Adorno makes the same point about the relationship between number and conceptual classification in the introduction to his book on Husserl.

> The difficulty in defining the concept of number stems from the fact that its own essence is the mechanism of concept formation, with the aid of which one would try to define it. The concept itself is subsumption and contains thereby a relationship of number. Numbers are arrangements that seek to make the nonidentical commensurable with the subject under the name of the many, the model of unity. They bring the multiplicity (*das Mannigfaltige*) of experience under abstraction. (1970a, 18)

The emphasis here is on the fact that number provides a structure for categorizing experience as comprised of homogeneous elements that are repeatable. As Adorno puts this, it "reduces" what is experienced to the "indeterminate," which can then be determined as "the many" (p. 17). This idea of conceptual subsumption as operating by way of a subtraction from what is given in experience is absolutely central to the understanding of how concepts work for both Bergson and Adorno. Adorno suggests that this reduction of reality to

distinct, repeatable units "cuts away everything that does not fit in" (p. 18). According to Adorno, this is the elimination of the experiencing subject incumbent on disenchantment. A line in Adorno's 1965–66 lectures notes that simply states "Elimination of the subject = quantification" expresses this point succinctly (2003a, 185).

The issue with conceptual classification is not merely that it simply picks out one part of an item of experience, that which it has in common with other items, and leaves out all its other characteristics. This is certainly an important part of how concepts work, but it is undergirded by a far more significant transformation of the structure of experience. This is the conception of reality as composed of distinct, isolated units; in other words, it is the layout of experience as composed of fungible exemplars. What makes each item an isolable unit is its identification in terms of a characteristic that is repeatable across an indefinite number of instances. In Bergson's terms, it is conceived as a unit in a multiplicity that is homogeneous. The issue is not that the item concerned also has other characteristics that do not enter into this unity, since those characteristics will *also* be conceived in terms of a homogeneous multiplicity in so far as they presuppose this structure of discrete, repeatable elements. Adorno often makes this point in terms of the structure of the exchange principle.[7] When items are identified in terms of their exchange value, they are understood to be instantiations of a value that can be replicated in an indefinite number of other units. This is to say that experiential items count as indifferent means to realize a value. To say that they are "indifferent" is simply a consequence of their transformation into homogeneous units; to say that they are "means" is to stress that their "value," or in conceptual terms the way that they "count"—their cognitive significance—is defined in terms of a repeatable characteristic; hence something that is detachable from those units themselves. If one wants to criticize this transformation, it is not enough to say that conceptual cognition "leaves out" something in the object, as though it subtracts a part from a whole. The root of the problem is the way that experiential items are conceived in terms of a quantitative multiplicity, as units that are identical and distinct, spread across empty space.

For both Bergson and Adorno, this idea has had a very powerful hold on our worldview, to such a degree that it has come to dominate entirely our philosophical understanding of what constitutes experience. It is, for both, the very basis of the idea of conceptual classification. Bergson's notion of *durée* is intended to denote a qualitative multiplicity that is inassimilable to mathematized space. It describes a way of joining elements together that does not involve the presence of a repeatable characteristic. Pure *durée*, he argues, is a "succession of qualitative changes that coalesce, penetrate one another, without precise contours, without any tendency to exteriorize themselves with regard to the others." In short, *durée* is "pure heterogeneity" (1908, 79).[8] What

Bergson has in mind here is the notion of a whole that is *qualitatively* altered, transformed, by the addition of a new element. What is distinctive about a heterogeneous multiplicity is that one cannot add to or subtract from it without changing the significance of *every* element within it. Bergson speaks of this type of multiplicity as "analogous to that of a melodic phrase." Just as, in a melody, each note gets its significance from the way it relates to all the other elements, so in any type of qualitative multiplicity one cannot change or remove an element without transforming the nature of the interaction among all the other elements.

The structure that Bergson is describing here is exactly that which Adorno understood, through Hegel, as dialectical mediation. What is distinctive about this is that it is not supposed to be a relation *between* elements, as though it were a chain linking them together externally. Mediation is something that inheres *within* the particular item itself, as the whole that makes it the kind of thing that it is. Adorno describes this quite nicely in a fragment on Beethoven.

> The success of Beethoven consists in this, that with him and him alone, the whole is never external to the individual but comes forth solely out of its movement, or rather it is this movement. In Beethoven, there is not mediation *between* themes, but as in Hegel the whole, pure becoming, is itself the concrete mediation. (1993d, 49)

What is key to dialectical mediation, for Adorno, is that it outlines the structure of an immanent universal. Whereas, as we saw, the universal of quantitative multiplicity is detachable, because it simply repeats across a series of elements, the universal of dialectical mediation is nothing other than the mutual interaction among its elements. Bergson's example of a melodic phrase illustrates this very well, since here the sense of the element is nothing other than its relation to all the other elements. The whole or universal, as Adorno puts it, is simply the movement between the components, or the figure formed by their mutual interaction. This means that the individual is not merely a token of a type. Rather than serving as a case or example of the universal, the individual expresses it. Its meaning is a riddle to which the whole or the universal is the solution. Finding a way to make possible this type of universal within discursive concepts is for Adorno crucial to recovering spiritual experience.

Adorno's claim that the whole is never external to the individual means that the individual item cannot be understood other than through the relations in which it is embedded. And these relations are not reducible to the inferential relations accessible in the conceptual determination of that item. As a note in a melody draws all of its significance, its coloring and its nuance, from the movement of the whole, so in dialectical mediation it is only as

reflected in all the other elements that surround it that an individual item becomes intelligible. Since each individual item is already, in this sense, the whole movement, one could start from any particular position in this structure and, through a focused attention on how this item presents itself in experience, it would be possible to retrace the form of the whole. And, to reiterate, this is because the whole is immanent in the individual item as the fullest account of its significance. Both Bergson's pure *durée* and Adorno's understanding of dialectical mediation (which is central to his notion of spiritual experience) point to a form of cognitive experience that is excluded from natural scientific thinking. Adorno's praise of Bergson as a philosopher who kept alive the memory of the nonconceptual derives from what Adorno perceives as Bergson's recognition of the constricted experience of natural-scientific thinking. While Bergson expresses this in terms of quantitative multiplicity versus qualitative multiplicity, and Adorno tends to talk in terms of identity thinking versus spiritual experience, both are concerned with a certain narrowing of the possibilities of cognitive experience through the dominance of a certain structure of conceptual classification. In the next section, I will look closely at how Bergson tackles this issue in what is arguably his most influential work, *Matter and Memory*.

MEMORY AND THE CONCEPT IN *MATTER AND MEMORY*

Adorno referred to Bergson's *Matter and Memory* as his "most productive and idiosyncratic work" (2003a, 107). Adorno's attraction to the arguments in this book are readily understandable, as it is here that Bergson mounts his most thorough critique of the subject-object dualism that Adorno identifies as the founding moment of the epistemological tradition. Bergson does not want to abolish this opposition (which would be nonsensical), but rather to soften it, to render it somewhat fluid. This dualism is replaced by a relation between two terms, matter and memory, that are more like two diverging tendencies than separate substances. Each state of consciousness is a unique synthesis of these two poles. The side of memory tends toward speculation, at the vanishing point it is pure fantasy construction, or dreaming. This is distinguished from the physical side of the body, which tends toward perception. At the same time, Bergson wants to assert a "radical" difference between actual sensations and "pure memory" (1939, 154). Here we encounter one of Bergson's founding theses: that memory cannot be made comprehensible as a weaker remnant of what was once a perception. Memory, that is to say, is not like an imprint on the brain, which grows weaker over time as it becomes more distanced from perception. Bergson will argue, in fact, that the form of existence of memory is entirely separate from the exigencies of perception.

To establish this point, Bergson makes a renowned distinction between two sorts of memory. Effectively, Bergson argues, the past survives in two distinct forms. One of them exists in the forms of motor mechanisms, the acquired, habitual responses to objects of certain kinds, from evolutionarily basic responses such as those prompted by a food source, or a physical danger, to more fine tuned responses such as those called for by activities such as playing the piano, or driving a car. The other, *mémoire pure*, consists of the entirety of past experiences stored independently of the motor mechanism and its relation to the instrumental demands of action. Bergson's example involves reciting a lesson (say, learning a poem), where in the motor function memory is preserved as the capacity for recitation, what Bergson calls habit, *habitude* (1939, 84). "One knows the lesson by heart," as the saying goes, when one can call it up and repeat it at will. It is important to note that habit only detaches from memory what is immediately useful in the instrumental context of action. The details, such as how one felt in the experience of learning the poem, what the differences were in each state of the learning process, do not inform action and thus find no place in motor memory. By contrast, in pure memory, "each of the lessons comes to my mind with its own unique individuality" (p. 83). What this suggests is that "pure" memory is the capacity to detach oneself from the immediate context of action. To be able to evoke an image of the past in the form of pure memory, Bergson argues, "one must be able to abstract oneself from the present action, one must know how to attach a price to the non-useful, one must be able to dream" (p. 87).[9]

For habitual memory, which serves the body and its possibilities of action, to recognize an object "is to know what to do with it" (1939, 101). Anticipating Heidegger's well-known discussion of *Zuhandenheit* in *Being and Time*, Bergson argues that our day-to-day encounters with things organize a scheme of movements and perceptions that follow on one another, according to an habitual system of action. This is why, for Bergson, recognition of an object is basically a phenomenon of the motor system; it is not at all the recalling of a certain "image." Bergson sums up this idea with the claim that "our day to day life takes place among objects of which the presence alone invites us to play a role" (p. 103). What Bergson calls the "sensory-motor system" of the body therefore structures perception so as to foreground useful effects that follow on potential possibilities of action. This point grounds the all-important thesis that perception cannot be understood as a "species of contemplation," an instrument that serves the "purely speculative" end of disinterested cognition (p. 71). It is in fact pure memory, in which the practical imperative is suspended, that plays a role closer to that of disinterested cognition. This is a crucial claim, because it means that the possibility of loosening the hold of habitual memory on experience (which, as I shall argue shortly, is equivalent to conceptual classification) depends on a recovery of the past.[10]

Bergson is quick to point out that most often "something else joins itself" to the recognitive scheme of motor memory (1939, 103). This something else is comprised of those pure images of the past that wait on a "fissure" between a perception and its translation into action in order to insert themselves. Whereas motor recognition pulls us toward the future through its delineation of possibilities of action, these images draw us toward the past by recalling the manner in which something was experienced. Bergson spells out this idea in terms of a theory of attention. Recognition and attention are described as two poles that pull in opposite directions: one (recognition) pulling us away from the object through covering it with certain possibilities for extracting useful effects; the other (attention) pulling us toward the object by a greater immersion in the particular quality of an experience. Bergson here develops the first significant image of *Matter and Memory*: the circuit. What Bergson has in mind is an intensification of a perception prompted by a mutual illumination of the two poles of "pure" memory (or past images) and the present perception (the perceptual image). What happens, essentially, is that features of perception begin to call up ideas (stored images), and as these ideas are brought to bear on the current perception, increasingly more elements in it become accessible as they enter into possible relations of significance with the ideas, and this process in turn calls up further ideas. Bergson describes this process as like an "electric circuit," where a stimulation of the senses set off by the object will pass via the "depths of the mind" and always return (with an enhanced charge) to the object itself (p. 114). Bergson makes clear that what happens in this process is a gradual penetration into the inner core of the object, as ever expanding circuits of memory excavate deeper into the exposed layers of reality. In this way, *mémoire pure* is able to return to the object the broader strata of significance, of which it was deprived through its disarticulation in the motor scheme governed by habitual memory. Bergson sums up the working of attention as follows:

> Attentive recognition . . . is a genuine *circuit*, where the exterior object delivers to us more and more profound parts of itself, in the degree to which our memory, symmetrically placed, adopts a higher state of tension in order to project memories towards it. . . . [T]o be attentive, to recognize with intellect, to interpret, are united in one and the same operation by which the mind . . . lets flow towards [brute perceptions] the memories that are intended to enfold it. (p. 128–29)

Bergson argued that the reach of pure memory, its ability to enhance perception, was always limited by the practical orientation of our engagement with the world. Hence the images stored in the pure memory "only materialize themselves by chance" (p. 116). Whether we recall particular images will

depend on the nature of what we perceive in the world. As such, pure memory remains under the sway of our orientation to the practically useful.[11] At one point in *Matter and Memory*, Bergson does discuss the hypothesis of a pure imagination, in which the work of memory, entirely detached from action, would form ties with the present organized by a noninstrumental logic (pp. 186–87). But this is seen as purely a limit point; in reality memory is always organized to some extent by the instrumental imperatives of action.[12]

Shortly after his distinguishing of the two forms of memory, Bergson notes that the example of a lesson learned by heart is "quite artificial" (1939, 89). It is artificial, he suggests, because the regular, repetitive nature of our day-to-day perceptions leads itself to the formation of a series of attitudes, which are triggers for movements that follow upon our perception of things. These attitudes are at the root of general concepts. This thesis becomes clear when Bergson describes *habitude* (habit) as "being to action what generality is to thought" (p. 173). Habitual memory, Bergson is claiming, is distinguished by the fact that it identifies a situation in terms of its resemblance to the characteristics of situations preceding it. The generality of thinking is derivative of this process in which habitual memory isolates certain elements in perception that repeat themselves, calling for a common response from the motor system. In contrast, Bergson suggests, *mémoire pure* is a contemplation that apprehends what is singular and nonrepeatable. What lies at the base of this distinction, Frédéric Worms has argued, is an opposition between the memory of an experience "in terms of what makes it unique and individual," and the acquisition of an experience "in terms of what makes it repeatable and general" (2004, 155). In describing what marks the singularity of pure memory, Bergson returns to the same idea that formed the basis for the theory of qualitative multiplicity. Again, the basis of the argument is not that generality leaves out *some thing* in an experiential item, but rather that experience is organized as a series of discrete, repeatable items. A pure memory is not simply a memory of such and such an object, or such and such a place. It forms an "indivisible whole" that is irreducible to a collection of logically or objectively separable contents (Worms 2004, 156). In pure memory, the whole is formed by the mutual illumination of all the elements in an experience, and it is this structure that resists the transformation into a number of isolable, repeatable contents.

The distinction between quantitative and qualitative multiplicity is therefore reconfigured in *Matter and Memory* in terms of habitual memory and pure memory. It is the practical focus of the body and its rootedness in the exigencies of life that transforms the unrepeatable individuality of memory into repeatable, general characteristics. The need or tendency that guides perception "goes straight to resemblance or to quality, and has nothing to do with individual differences." The general idea, therefore, is habitude (as sensed, or

"lived") before it becomes an explicit representation; it is an identity of attitude in a diversity of situations. As Bergson puts this elsewhere, generality is "nothing else originally than *habitude* ascending from the sphere of action to that of thought" (1938, 57). Bergson can now argue that general ideas become possible through a double movement in which, moving in one direction, the understanding extracts from habitual resemblances a clear conception of generality, and, moving in the opposite direction, memory "grafts distinctions" on the resemblances that are spontaneously formed in perception (1939, 179). This argument is the basis of Bergson's famous cone image (p. 181). Two things are particularly striking about the thesis. First, a clear consequence of Bergson's view is that the individual events that comprise memory are *never perceived*. Because perception "goes straight to resemblance or quality," the individual quality of an experience never finds its way in to perception. Bergson's point about memory "grafting distinctions" literally means that it is only in the form of an image that is past, freed of the practical imperatives that guide perception, that the individual quality of an experience can become accessible.[13] Genuine experience is therefore available only through reconstruction, by recovering what "went under" in the instrumental organization of perception. The second striking aspect is the representation of general concepts as a tension between two poles. The cone image expresses this in terms of the habitual schemes of perception, which form the summit, and at the base, the series of individual images that comprise memory. The general idea or concept cannot be pinned down to either of these extremes, but is comprised of a continual oscillation, constantly readying itself "either to crystallize itself in articulated words, or to evaporate itself in memories" (p. 180).

I suggested that Bergson's distinction between habitual memory and pure memory develops the earlier distinction in the *Essay* concerning quantitative and qualitative multiplicity. What is particularly significant about the development of this distinction in *Matter and Memory*, and, so I will argue, crucial for situating Adorno's own critique of conceptual classification, is that it becomes a tension *within* the concept between two movements—one narrowing inward to the extraction of a repeatable characteristic and the other moving outward toward countless individual images that are pure difference.[14] In effect, Bergson argues, all memory images are linked through what he calls "affinities" (1939, 183). It is an error, linked to the mathematization of experience, to believe that memories are lined up side by side, distinct from one another, like marbles in a bag. This means that memories can be integrated into a perception by a process that Bergson calls "dilation"; consciousness opens itself up to the affinities that memory images have to the present perception (p. 184). Moving in the other direction, consciousness is able to narrow down this work of discovering affinities by a process of contraction, focusing once again on what is repeatable in an expe-

rience. To visualize the process of dilation, Bergson uses the metaphor of a "nebulous mass seen in those telescopes that are becoming more and more powerful," which "resolves itself into a growing number of stars" (p. 184–85). The point here is that the redirection of attention in dilation is able to open up relations that are invisible to the standard inferences organized by the instrumental scheme of *habitude*.

Now that I have outlined Bergson's theory of the formation of general concepts in *Matter and Memory*, it is time to look a little more closely at how Adorno reads Bergson's theory as an outbreak attempt, and also what differences emerge between the two in regard to this problematic. The core of Adorno's reading of *Matter and Memory* is contained in the following passage:

> Bergson held the nonconceptual [*das Begrifflos*] for the higher truth in opposition to those classificatory concepts, and sought for it in a layer of more or less amorphous images [*Bilder*], which are supposed to be located underneath consciousness and underneath the conceptual,—thus an unconscious world of images . . . which, as opposed to the pre-arranged consciousness that comes to be through abstraction, are supposed to be something like an immediate knowledge of the things themselves. (2003a, 106–107)

The "amorphous images" to which Adorno refers here are obviously the *souvenir-images* that for Bergson are supposed to compose pure memory. Before looking at Adorno's criticism of Bergson, it is worthwhile examining briefly the nature of the significant affinity that Adorno alludes to in this passage. An important consequence of Bergson's theory is that a different of nature between mind and matter has been recast as a difference of degree between two sorts of memory. In this sense, Bergson, like Adorno, wants to resist the radical separation of subject and object. The nonconceptual is conceived, on Bergson's view, as one dimension of the concept, but it is a dimension that is ordinarily hidden by the focused working of the habitual scheme of action. Hence those "amorphous images" cannot find their way into experience. Through dilation, however, these images may find an entry point, as the nebulous mass dissolves into a "growing number of stars." It is useful to compare this metaphor with Adorno's example of dialectic in terms of "looking through a microscope at a drop of water that begins to teem with life" (1993b, 133). This is supposed to describe the moment in which the concept "breaks up" in the dialectical movement "that makes it immanently other than itself." Rather than standing in a relation to one another as instantiations of a single, repeatable property, the elements of a concept are organized around it as nonidentical or irreducible individuals that illuminate it from different perspectives. The concept dissolves into the arrangement formed by

these elements, as a drop of water dissolves into an arrangement of molecules when seen through a microscope. Adorno spells this out more fully in the following passage:

> The specificity of philosophy as a configuration of moments is qualitatively different from a lack of ambiguity in every particular moment, even within this configuration, because the configuration itself is more, and other, than the quintessence of its moments. Constellation is not system. Everything does not become resolved, everything does not come out even; rather, one moment sheds light on the other, and the figures that the individual moments form together are specific signs and a legible script. (1993b, 109)

The similarity with Bergson here is this: the view of the concept as encompassing a general (repeatable) characteristic is opposed to another perspective in which the concept is interpreted as the presentation or configuration of irreducible singularities that illuminate each other. To elucidate the concept in dialectic is therefore to let it dissolve itself into the arrangement, allowing the organization of elements to probe and penetrate its surface.

For Adorno, the configuration makes the concept accessible in the form of spiritual experience; it outlines the context that makes that concept intelligible. The transformation of a concept into an instrument of identity thinking, to use Adorno's terms, concerns the contraction (Bergson's phrase) of its content to the signaling of habitual inferences. The possibility of articulating the concept as an immanent universal now gets lost. But it is precisely this type of universal that Bergson wants to capture with the "moving, changing, colored, living" unity of *durée*, as opposed to the "abstract, immobile, and empty" unity of natural scientific thinking (1938, 189). Bergsonian dilation hints at a way of opening up the concept to the context of noninferential relations, allowing the experiential context to inform conceptual content.

Adorno's central criticism of Bergson is that Bergson does not allow this movement to take place at the level of the concept. Here is Adorno's most explicit statement of this criticism.

> With Bergson a duality of cognition is assumed with a certain sort of arbitrariness: on the one side [the] profound knowledge of essence nourished by images, and on the other the cognition of the conventional classifying science, which remain next to one another in dualistic fashion as two possibilities. . . . Thereby it escapes his notice that the so-called intuitive cognitions or those images, which should have objectivity as pre-conceptual moments in the subject, cannot be expressed other than through the concept. (2003a, 108)

Bergson, Adorno wants to claim, does not find a way to use the concept to break open the concept. In the end, Bergson resorts to a dualistic theory that simply opposes a nonconceptual form of knowing to conceptual cognition. Adorno emphasizes that the only way of getting at what is under the concept is by going *through* it, not around it. To oppose conceptual cognition to another form of knowing is in fact precisely to repeat the rigid oppositions that Bergson sets out to undermine. Therefore, the only solution is to use the concept to bring it to a reflection of its own inadequacy, or in other words to bring the concept to self-consciousness. While, I will argue, there is merit in Adorno's criticism, it must be said that Bergson's theory does not quite fit the dualist label in the severe sense in which Adorno uses this term. As we have seen, Bergson does allow some interaction between pure memory and perception, which is under the sway of practical imperatives. Bergson speaks at one point of certain "confused memories" that, although without relation to the present situation, somehow find their way into consciousness, and sketch around the focus of habitude a "fringe that is less visible, which eventually extinguishes itself in an immense obscure realm" (1939, 90). In *Creative Evolution*, perhaps Bergson's most "dualist" book, he returns to this metaphor of a "fringe" around the representations of the intelligence. Here, Bergson is tantalizingly close to uncovering something like a dialectic of the concept in Adorno's sense, that is, a type of writing that would use concepts to bring to the surface the experiential conditions that cannot be said within those concepts.[15] This would be, for Adorno, a way of reaching the nonconceptual while staying rigorously within the concept.

Intuition: The External Demarcation of the Concept

The problematic of the outbreak attempt, as we have seen, concerns the thinking subject's sense of being somehow confined in its own thought structures, as though the very tools used to organize experience, to render it manipulable and predictable, form a barrier that cuts off the subject from deeper layers of experience. Adorno and Bergson, I argued, propose a similar explanation for this sentiment, although the nuance is different. The similarity lies in an account of intelligence (Bergson), or the concept (Adorno) as being modeled on the imperative of utility, or what Adorno talks about in terms of the need of self-preservation. The intelligence therefore does not serve a purely speculative interest; it is rooted in practical needs. This, of course, is not by itself problematic. It becomes so only when the classificatory concept *mis-takes* itself as disinterested theoretical comprehension. Adorno tells a story about the classificatory concept gradually coming to assert itself as the sole legitimate authority on

the cognitive significance of experience. In doing so, it has to subtract the experiencing subject from experience, in order to render it maximally controllable; this is the movement of diremption that leads to disenchantment. In this section, I want to look at Bergson's account of the self-misunderstanding of the intelligence in *Creative Evolution*.

At a key point in the argument of *Creative Evolution*, Bergson raises an objection to his own thinking that suggests an acute awareness of the problematic posed by the outbreak attempt (1941, 193). The objection suggests that the striving to get beyond the intelligence is futile, since "how will you achieve this, if not with the intelligence itself?" One cannot "step outside" one's thinking, and thus talk of "generating [*engendrer*]" the intelligence seems nonsensical, since, as Bergson's fictional opponent concludes, "it is still with your intelligence itself that you would construct this genesis." This passage, which occurs early in chapter 3, has been set up in the first half of *Creative Evolution* by Bergson's attempt to "generate" the intelligence by framing it as a functional adjunct of life. The intelligence, Bergson argues, "is not at all designed to think *evolution*, in the proper sense of the word, that is to say the continuity of a transformation that would be pure mobility" (p. 164). The intelligence, therefore, is limited from the outside. However, beginning from life itself, it *is* possible to explain the intelligence in terms of the practical ends of the life process. Furthermore, this explanation will account for the incapacity of the intelligence itself to seize life in its fullness. This argument is what I am calling Bergson's external demarcation of the concept.

Bergson announces at the beginning of *Creative Evolution* the limitation of the intelligence within the evolution of organic life. As an "annex" of the capacity for action, the intelligence is at home in the world of "inert objects," "solids," in other words, spatial relations among stable, discrete entities, which the intelligence is able to analyze and dissect for the purposes of human action on the world of nature (1941, v). As he puts this somewhat hyperbolically later on, "we only think in order to act" (p. 44). As in *Matter and Memory*, Bergson portrays the intelligence as a faculty that isolates resemblances in a given situation, retaining from things nothing else than the aspect of repetition (p. 29). Because it is interested in things in so far as they exemplify features that can serve to satisfy human needs, the intelligence is bound to represent objects as loci that instantiate a particular quality or property. However the aspects that make the intelligence able to guide successful action on the world are also what prevent it from being able to grasp the nature of life, which exceeds the principle of repetition. Specifically, it is the true nature of time as *durée* that the intelligence is unable to comprehend. Of course, the intelligence does employ its own concept of time, but this is a spatialized time, the juxtaposition of discrete units linked externally by causal principles. It is not the "perpetual becoming" that Bergson has in mind, the "reciprocal interpenetration,

creation that continues indefinitely," and which is not bound by repetition (pp. 179, 272). But even though this is not accessible to the intelligence, we are still, in a sense, aware of it. Although "we do not *think* real time," Bergson asserts, "we live it, because life exceeds the intelligence" (p. 46). Life here emerges as the broader movement that encompasses the intelligence; it is something that we *live* but that we cannot *think*, since thinking is the province of the intelligence.

This returns us to the question posed by Bergson's fictional interlocutor. How are we supposed to grasp what exceeds the intelligence if we cannot think it? Bergson's response develops a revealing metaphor.

> It is of the essence of reasoning to enclose us in the circle of the given. But action breaks open the circle. If you had never seen a man swim, you would perhaps say that swimming is something that is impossible, given that, in order to learn to swim, one has to start by entering the water, and in consequence one must already know how to swim. Reasoning always effectively fixes me to solid ground. But if, quite simply, I throw myself into the water without being afraid . . . I shall learn to swim. (1941, 193–94)

Bergson is saying that because the intelligence is constructed so as specifically to be able to comprehend matter, or discrete solids arranged in empty space, it is fruitless to try to reason one's way out of the circle. Because the intelligence necessarily solidifies what it touches, all that one succeeds in doing is to push the boundaries of the circle outward; there is no breakout. Therefore (and this is the sense of the metaphor) actually *doing* it must in some sense precede the ability to explain the significance of it. Once one learns how to swim, one can move backward to an explanation of its relation to being able to walk, but it is not possible to get there from the second alone. What is necessary for our thinking, Bergson claims, is that it "makes the leap [*faire le saut*]"; the intelligence must be "pushed outside of its realm" by an "act of will" (p. 194–95).

Adorno's response to this conception of the outbreak is given concisely in a note in the 1965–66 lectures on negative dialectic, stating "[the] outbreak [is] not possible as an act, but rather only through self-reflection" (2003a, 99).[16] An outbreak undertaken on the basis of subjective willing (*Willkür*), argues Adorno, will succeed only in reaching an objectivity that is simply a mirror effect of the very subjectivity that it wants to transcend. The point Adorno wants to make here is that an outbreak executed on these terms will end up repeating the idealist error of conceiving objectivity as a projection of the subject. Like Husserl's essences, Bergson's *Bilderwelt* (world of images) turns out to be a reification of conscious processes. The idealist implications

of Bergson's philosophy stem from the way the outbreak is conceived as an action of the subject, and thus contradict the explicit intentions of that philosophy. The difference that Adorno has in mind when he speaks of executing the outbreak as self-reflection could be put, somewhat schematically, as follows: idealism, beginning from secure self-possession, wants to move outside the subject by showing that what is outside can be comprehended by what is inside, thereby surmounting the boundary between the two; Adorno's *Selbstbesinnung* wants to show that what is "outside" is always already inside, hence there is no such thing as the "coincidence of our self with itself." Rather than moving outward to show that there is nothing that cannot be assimilated by the subject, self-reflection demonstrates the extent of the subject's dependence on what is outside it. The putative autonomy of the subject is itself, as a side effect of diremption, an illusion fabricated by this dependence. Put in terms of the outbreak attempt this means that the move toward the nonconceptual must begin by deflating the subject's claim to autonomy and self-subsistence. Because it rests on the demonstration of the dependence of the concept on conditions it does not control (and finally, as we have seen, on the conditions of disenchantment resulting in the estrangement of subject and object), *Selbstbesinnung* does not at all rest on the view that the idea of confinement is a philosophical mistake. In fact, what *Selbstbesinnung* does is to reveal the truth content of the philosophical representation of confinement as an accurate recapitulation of social-historical experience.

Bergson is no more able than Husserl to leave behind the classificatory concept; the Bergsonian leap cannot break the spell of the withering of experience. Adorno's elucidation of this criticism is revealing.

> Experience in the emphatic sense, the nexus [*Geflecht*] of unmutilated cognition, which may serve as a model for philosophy, is not distinguished from science through a higher principle or instrument, but rather through the use which it makes of the means, especially the conceptual means, which as such resemble those of science, and also through its attitude to objectivity. Just as what Bergson calls intuition cannot be denied in such experience, so it cannot be hypostasized. (1970a, 52)

Bergson does not take the path of dialectical critique because he accepts Kant's argument in the first critique that dialectical reasoning cannot lead to metaphysical cognition. The attempt to extend the powers of reasoning beyond experience, insofar as experience is circumscribed by the categories of the understanding, simply leads reason into a dead end. As Bergson reads him, Kant's important insight in the first critique is that a genuine metaphysics could only be reconstituted in the form of a "vision" or perception (1938, 154).

Bergson refers to this as "intuition," and it is, he argues, something that Kant had intended with his infamous remarks on "intellectual intuition." Kant's error, Bergson argues, was that, having demonstrated that no "dialectical effort" would lead us into the "beyond" (*l'au-delà*), Kant went on to assume that an intuitive metaphysics is impossible because we would have to transport ourselves outside of the "domain of the senses and of consciousness" (p. 141). Bergson's counter argument is that this claim depends on an unwarranted identification of our ordinary (intellectual) conceptions of time and change with time and change as they really are. Once we dispense with this assumption, metaphysical intuition can be revived as the attempt "to recapture change and *durée* in their original mobility" (p. 157). This is not a transcending of perception, it is rather a concerted attempt to bring back perception to its origins by undoing the obfuscations that follow upon the arrangement of what is presented to our senses and our consciousness for the practical imperatives of our action in the world.

Bergson sometimes refers to intuition as a capacity for "sympathy," reaching what is "unique" and "inexpressible" in the object (1938, 181). Instead of dissecting the object so as to render it manipulable, it follows the reverberations of the thing itself. As Bergson sees it, the aesthetic faculty is a descendant of the capacity for intuition.

> Our eye perceives the traits of a living being, but juxtaposed one to another and not organized among themselves. What escapes it is the intention of life, the simple movement that courses through the divisions, which links them one to another and gives them a signification. It is this intention that the artist aims to recapture in resituating himself in the interior of the object by a sort of sympathy, in reducing, by an effort of intuition, the barrier that space interposes between the artist and his subject. (1941, 178)

The role of artists, Bergson states, is to bring to perception what goes under in the day-to-day ordering of senses according to practical imperatives (1938, 149). Art, for Bergson, is a realm where metaphysical intuition is rescued, not as a transcending of the senses, but rather as a deeper penetration of the sensuous properties of the world. Art, Bergson argues, "suffices to show us that an extension of our faculties of perception is possible" (p. 150). This is a view of metaphysical knowledge that is almost the exact inverse of the Platonic turning of the attention of the soul toward the ideas. For Bergson, intuition turns away from the practical interests of day-to-day cognition, but only in order to immerse itself more deeply in what presents itself to the sensuous faculties.[17] What does art aim at, Bergson asks, if not to show us "things which did not explicitly occur to our senses or our consciousness?" (p. 149).

Adorno's dissatisfaction with this entire approach demonstrates clearly his (partial) commitment to the Hegelian critique of Kant. Bergson sides with Kant in so far as he agrees that the dialectic of reason cannot get out of the circle; it simply leads to the assertion and counterassertion of opposed standpoints. Adorno follows Hegel in claiming that the dialectic of reason will lead to metaphysical insight into the nature of the concept. But, *contra* Hegel, the insight concerns the dependence of the concept on conditions outside it, not the enfolding of the object into subjectivity. Bergson's approach, Adorno believes, provides no way back from the immediate contact with the course of life to the rational articulation of that intuition in the concept. Spiritual experience is possible only through breaking apart the classificatory concept from within.

CONFINEMENT AS *HABITUDE*

It is the work of habitual memory, as we saw, that for Bergson limits cognition to the dimensions that can serve the furtherance of practical interests. The everyday, taken-for-granted ways of classifying things, with static categories, close off a more profound attention to the essence buried within things. It is habit—*habitude*—that must be surmounted by a metaphysics aiming at genuine knowledge. Bergson often describes *habitude* in terms that delineate clearly its influence on the Lukácsian concept of second nature. It is, in essence, human practice congealing into fixed, impenetrable structures that would "suffocate" our freedom of action if it were not to be constantly renewed (1941, 128). Bergson speculates that the confinement of reason to regulative principles, the founding moment of Kantian critique, is nothing more than a recapitulation of the habitual encrustations that close off new and different ways of getting access to experience.

> The powerlessness of speculative reason, such as Kant has demonstrated it, is perhaps in the end nothing more than the powerlessness of an intelligence enslaved to certain necessities of bodily life, and exerting itself on a matter that it has been necessary to disarticulate for the satisfaction of our needs. Our knowledge of things should then no longer be relative to the fundamental structure of our minds, but simply to its superficial and acquired habits [*habitudes*], to the contingent form that it derives from our bodily functioning and our inferior needs. The relativity of knowledge should therefore not be definitive. (1939, 205)

The impulse here to historicize what Adorno calls the Kantian "block," to reinscribe the transcendental as *habitude*, establishes the task of philosophy as that of a reflection on its *own* coming-to-be.

The problem that now arises is how we would recognize the breach of the new into the world of *habitude*. This, of course, is the classic problem of how to make sense of the idea of new experience: if we recognize it then, by definition, it is not genuinely new; if we do not recognize it, then we would lack the categories to be able to assimilate it. For Bergson, the intelligence, which is a faculty designed for "linking the same to the same," is unable to explain the possibility of genuinely new experience (1941, 52). It is only from the perspective of *durée*, the creative flow of the past towards the future, that new experience becomes intelligible. There is another important similarity with Adorno's spiritual experience at this point, since Adorno stresses that a central characteristic of spiritual experiences is that something new is supposed to become available in them (2003a, 123). Furthermore, the current epistemology and its concept of experience, Adorno argues echoing Bergson, cuts off (*abschneidet*) the possibility of new experience through its ground rules. Plato, of course, proposed *anamnesis* (remembrance) as a solution to the problem of new experience in the *Phaedrus*. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson develops a similar view in so far as he locates the appearance of the new in the past, not in (present) perception. It is the recovery of those *souvenir-images* that did not make their way into the conscious thought process because of the organization of perception in terms of practical needs.

Although Adorno follows Bergson in giving memory a crucial role in the appearance of the "new," he also wants to show that the new can be brought to the surface in the self-articulation of concepts. In an important passage, Adorno argues that we must understand the appearance *within* habitual classification schemes of what is inassimilable *by* these schemes as a "blind spot"—a shimmer, or a flash that, in an instant, stops the classificatory cogs from turning. In this moment, the experience of the uncanny, *habitude* is pulled up short and, for a brief moment, sees itself as if from the outside. Here is the full passage.

> Only the cognitions that appear in a flash [*aufblitzende Erkenntnisse*] are saturated with memory and foresight, while those officially "incorporated" cognitions, as Bergson became aware, are expunged from the temporal as memory-less cognitions. The knower is overwhelmed in the moment of intuition and torn out of the monotony of mere subsumption by the actual presence of judgments, conclusions and relations belonging in the past [*vergangen*]. . . . [A]s a blind spot in the process of cognition, from out of which they cannot be prized free, intuitions hold reason to reflect on itself as the mere form of reflection of arbitrariness [*Willkür*], in order to bring arbitrariness to an end. (1970a, 53–54)

What Adorno wants to articulate here is the point where *habitude*, the habitual schemes of classification brought to bear on experience, reach the limit of their capacity to express what is before them. At this point, the knower cannot assimilate his or her experience to taken for granted cognitive schemes, hence the sense of being "overwhelmed." Because the habitual conceptual schemes of the knower literally cannot *say* what is in the experience, its cognitive value appears only "in a flash"—a momentary recognition that our cognitive schemes are inadequate, that they cut experience short.

The formulation that Adorno uses to express this moment where the concept is able to reflect on its own experiential conditions originates with Proust, who speaks of the eruption of forgotten memories into the world of *habitude* as occurring in *la durée d'un éclair*—the duration of a lightning flash (1999a, 2267). Walter Benjamin takes up this expression in his reference to the dialectical image as an *aufblitzendes*, a flash in which the past appears in the "now of its being cognizable" (1982, 591–92). The point of these formulations is to express the momentary suspension of *habitude*. What is recalled in the moment of recognition, Adorno suggests, is the historical sense of the object—its saturation by judgments "belonging in the past." This signals the dependence of rational concepts on a historical process that determines how experience can be encountered within them. It is in these experiences that *habitude* is unhinged; the cognitive schemes habitually employed are revealed to be groundless, that is to say, the naturalness of everyday classifications is demystified. It has to be momentary, *aufblitzend*, because it appears *within* conceptual cognition as the consciousness of that cognition's own dependence on a history that is not fully rational. Instead of being able to assimilate this history within a narrative of rational progress, the concept can only recognize it, and its own dependence upon it, as a form of "arbitrariness." This is precisely the dependence of the concept on the nonconceptual that it is the goal of negative dialectic to bring to the surface. The concept cannot put this into words without turning it into another conceptualizable content, thereby transforming it from a nonrational condition of the operation of concepts into another move within the space of reasons.[18]

As we saw, it is such an experience, in the form of the revelation of *Entfremdung*, or alienation, that Adorno thinks he can bring to expression in Husserl's logical absolutism. To use the terms I have been developing here, the metacritique recovers the historical process from which epistemology, as a structure of classificatory concepts, is an abstraction. The recovered history is not "outside" the concept, since it makes the concept what it is, but it is not inside it either, otherwise the concept could take possession of it (to use Adorno's phrase) by dissecting it. This is why one must speak here of "forgetting." Epistemology, in a momentary recognition, is able to reflect on what its structure constitutively forgets. Thereby, epistemology is resituated in terms of

its dependence on the nonconceptual: it appears with its full, disclosed historical sense. Of course, the concept of epistemology is the *sine qua non* of this analysis, since it has a key role in the inauguration of diremption, the severance of subject and object, that creates the classificatory concept. But the same strategy should be applicable to every classificatory concept. It must be possible, in principle, to recover the dependence on the nonconceptual of *all* concepts that, as purely classificatory concepts, have been dissevered from their dependence on historical experience.[19] It is spiritual experience that is supposed to make possible the recovery of this dependence of the concept. The concept is put into an arrangement with other concepts that brings to the surface the experiential dependence of concepts. What is experienced in spiritual experience is therefore the truth about the concept that went under in its reduction to a classifying mechanism. In the dialectical arrangement of concepts, the social-historical experience that impressed itself into the concept becomes accessible as the concrete whole that surrounds the concept; the concept does not possess this whole as its content, rather it serves as a gathering point for its exhaustive arrangement.

The Internal Subversion of the Concept

I have been talking about the critique of the classificatory concept as taking place, according to Adorno, in terms of the recovery of the experiential conditions on which concepts are dependent. I have been talking about the moment where the classificatory concept breaks down as the moment where *habitude* (habit) is unhinged—where, that is, there occurs an experience that cannot be assimilated by everyday schemes of classification, generating a gap between the claim of intelligibility emanating from an experience and what can be *said* about this experience in the concept. While I have been claiming that both Adorno and Bergson aim to recover experiences of this sort, and both undertake a similar critique of the classificatory concept, I have also emphasized that Adorno's solution, unlike Bergson's, stays *within* the classificatory concept. This, I suggested, is why Adorno rejects Bergson's postulation of a separate form of cognition—intuition—that can reach outside the concept and attach itself (Bergson talks of "sympathy" in this regard) to the object. This is where Adorno wants to defend the Hegelian claim that it is possible to execute a critique of the concepts of the understanding as a dialectic of concepts. Bergson, in contrast, accepts Kant's view that such a dialectic is impossible, and that the only way to penetrate beyond appearance is by way of a sort of vision, in the form of an intuition. What Hegel knew but Bergson didn't, Adorno argues, was that "a conception of reason that supersedes reason must fail hopelessly by its own criteria" (1993b, 73). Bergson

uses the very conceptual resources of natural-scientific thinking to contrast it with another source of knowledge outside of it. Adorno argues that this is self-defeating; only "through reflection can reflective thought get beyond itself." I now have to make good on this claim that there *is* a way to work against the classificatory concept from within, in this way bringing the concept to an awareness of its own dependence. If this argument can be sustained, it will show that Adorno had discovered a way to open up the concept from within, in the process avoiding the constitutive problems of the failed outbreak attempts mounted by Husserl and Bergson.

I want to begin this argument by noting that, in fact, Bergson was a hair's breadth from a similar insight in his remarks on the rigidification of concepts. Bergson, in passages like the following, suggests that what is called for is another way of using concepts.

> [Metaphysics] is not properly such except when it goes beyond the concept, or at least when it frees itself [*s'affranchit*] from rigid and prefabricated concepts in order to create concepts that are very different from those that we employ habitually; I have in mind supple representations, mobile, almost fluid, always ready to mould themselves on the fleeting forms of intuition. (1938, 188)

Bergson makes this point in the context of a critique of conceptual subsumption as a form of abstraction that misses the distinctive particularity of the object. Bergson here emphasizes the emergence of the concept in a comparison between the object and others that picks out a common, repeatable property, or a resemblance. Bergson asserts that the classifying concept cannot express the nature of the property in so far as it entwined with the unique constellation of qualities that make the particular what it is (p. 187). An "empiricism worthy of the name," Bergson argues, would see itself obliged to create a new concept for each object it comes across (pp. 196–97). Rather than employing prefabricated concepts—*vêtements de confection*—this would involve the effort to "tailor for each object a concept appropriate to it alone." Concepts, Bergson suggests, must find a way to become fluid, mobile, to counteract the rigidity of *habitude*. But how is this supposed to be possible? How, that is to say, can the movement of abstraction plus generalization, the movement that leads to the extraction of repeatable properties, be counteracted? Here is where Bergson (almost) reaches the all-important insight. He is talking about the insufficiency of moving from the concept to the thing (rather than from intuition to the concept).

> There is hardly any concrete reality on which one cannot take at the same time two opposed views and which cannot be subsumed, in

> consequence, under two antagonistic concepts. Hence a thesis and antithesis that one would search in vain to reconcile logically, for the very simple reason that one can never construct a thing with concepts or points of view. *But in the case of the object seized by intuition, one passes without difficulty, in a lot of cases, to the two contrary concepts*; and as, thereby, one sees reality emerge from the thesis and the antithesis, one seizes at the same time how this thesis and this antithesis are opposed and how they reconcile themselves. (p. 198; my emphasis)

When unified by an appropriate insight, an intuition of the object, Bergson is suggesting, the concepts that compete to capture the significance of the object will no longer relate to one another externally, as mutually exclusionary.

Adorno's claim is that, by articulating concepts to the point where their meaning is conditioned by the position they enter into within the whole rather than through a content that belongs to them exclusively, language is able to recover its expressive moment. Adorno effectively forces language to work against its inherent spatialization, using concepts to illuminate each other by constructing a context that says more than what is attributable to the content of those concepts. *Contra* Bergson, philosophy never steps outside the concept, but it brings to the surface what the concept cannot say. The identification *with* the thing (rather than *of* the thing) that Bergson believes requires a leap outside conceptual knowing, is for Adorno to be approached by the self-correction of concepts in the course of their self-articulation.

Dialectic is the practice of the insistent interrogation of concepts, in which the persistent gap between what a concept *says* and the density of experience that exceeds this saying drives the concept forward on a continual process of self-correction. As Adorno puts this, the "movement of the concept is not a sophistical manipulation that would insert changing meanings into it from the outside," it is rather "the ever-present consciousness of both the identity of and the inevitable difference between the concept and what it is supposed to express, a consciousness that animates all genuine knowledge" (1993b, 71). Hegel's claim that contradiction is the medium of conceptual movement is not a claim that traditional logic is false.[20] But it is a claim that, applied as fixed classificatory schemes, logical concepts will fall short of giving expression to experience. The recognition of the concept's inadequacy is what Adorno refers to as the "guilt" of thought in relation to what it thinks (1966, 17). What gets dialectic off the ground is simply this sentiment that experience is cut short by the concept. Its movement is therefore the attempt to rectify or correct its error.

Dialectic is not a movement *between* concepts, as though one were dealing with distinct concepts that state opposing things. The movement is driven by the tensions that are present in a concept, tensions which dialectic is able

to elucidate in term of its dependence on a social-historical context. What differentiates Adorno's employment of contradiction from Hegel's is that, whereas Hegel takes it to be a form of contact with the deeper essence of things, Adorno understands it to be the way an experience that is unassimilable by conceptual categories appears *in* these categories. This is the sense of the claim in *Negative Dialectic* that "[c]ontradiction is non-identity under the spell of a law that also affects the nonidentical" (1966, 18). Adorno elaborates on this in an important passage in *Negative Dialectic*.

> Since [the] totality is constructed in accordance with logic, the core of which is the law of the excluded middle,[21] so everything that does not submit to it, everything qualitatively different, carries the seal of contradiction. Contradiction is non-identity under the aspect of identity; the primacy of the principle of contradiction in the dialectic measures the heterogeneous according to unitary thinking [*Einheitsdenken*]. In so far as the latter collides with its limit, it exceeds itself [*übersteigt es sich*]. (p. 17)

Thinking is able to reveal what is beyond its classificatory categories (as Adorno puts it, it "exceeds itself") by reaching the limit of its ability to make sense. Contradiction is therefore the striving of concepts that have become rigid, or stale, to put experience into words. It was in Marcel Proust's literary project that Adorno discovered the resources for this employment of the Hegelian idea of contradiction. It is to Proust's work, and his influence on Adorno that I will now turn.

6

Proust

Experience Regained

Introduction

In his "micro-commentaries" on *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Adorno describes Proust's revolt against a "subsuming form imposed from above" (1974a, 203). Challenging the conventional representations of universal and particular, Proust, Adorno claims, takes seriously Hegel's argument that "the particular is the universal and vice versa, both are mediated through one another." The link that Adorno wants to make between Proust and Hegel concerns the role of rationality (that is, conceptual understanding) in expressing fundamental truths. Just as, for Hegel, the true must be expressible in the concept, so, as Adorno reads him, Proust wants to balance the powers of intuition with the insights of rationality. This is why, for Adorno, Proust's answer to the withering of experience is superior to that of Bergson. Adorno makes this point clear in his 1965–66 lectures on negative dialectic.

> One could almost say that precisely the attempt of the Proustian novel to put the Bergsonian philosophy to the test, has refuted to a certain extent the Bergsonian outbreak attempt, for the very reason that Proust makes use of the instrument of rational . . . cognition in order to reach the concrete, to reach the indissoluble as he had conceived it, exactly as would have been ruled out according to the sense of Bergsonian epistemology. (2003a, 109)

What Adorno finds in Proust, then, is a way of reaching the concrete, of bringing the particular to language, from within the framework of the discursive

concept.[1] Proust, according to Adorno, shows that to take realism seriously—the attempt to describe the thing in the most exact fashion possible—necessitates the saturation of the real with the experience of the subject.

In the 1965–66 lectures on negative dialectic, Proust is described as having succeeded to a certain extent where Bergson and Husserl had failed.[2] I want to argue that this comment is explained by the profound affinity between the theory of experience that governs Adorno's discussion in negative dialectic and the goals of Proust's literary technique. The intention of negative dialectic is to outline the form of an outbreak attempt that would remain within the concept, hence avoiding the errors of Husserl and Bergson. This is expressed clearly in the preface, where Adorno describes his task as that of "break[ing] through the delusion of constitutive subjectivity with the power of the subject" (1966, 10). The "delusion" that Adorno refers to here is equivalent to the claim that an object can be known only when it is conceived as an exemplar (or instantiation) of a general property; hence the object is known when it is given a transferable "value," according to how it is classified by a subject.[3] Prior to its subsumption under the subject as the moment of form, the particular is blind and formless. This, of course, is a constructed (or mediated) immediacy: experiential items are prepared for their entry into the classificatory structures of constitutive subjectivity by the prior evacuation of their significance for a subject, the meaning that attaches to how they are experienced. The transformation of the experiential item into the empirical exemplar leaves behind what Proust calls the *déchet* of experience—its refuse or waste (1999a, 2280). It is reality when seen as mediated by a process of subtraction, which takes place as the elimination of the experiencing subject from the determination of the cognitive significance of experience. Proust's novelistic masterpiece represents an attempt to recover the role of the subject in experience, and therefore comprises a critique of the consequences of disenchantment. Proust's subject is neither a blank surface on which impressions are embossed, nor is it the forming moment of cognition that synthesizes blind particulars. Proust's subject is one that is reactive, responsive, and above all sensitive to the minutest details as harboring deeper significance. At one point, Proust's narrator speaks of the "interior violin" whose strings are "tightened and relaxed by simple differences of temperature, of exterior lighting" (1999a, 1621). It is this instrument, the subject's very responsiveness to the significance of the world, which "the uniformity of *habitude* has rendered silent." When Adorno talks of using the strength of the subject to break through constitutive subjectivity, he means a process that would reverse the constitutive abstraction that drives disenchantment by finding a way to allow the experience of the subject to inform the cognitive sense of concepts.

The idea of using the subject to reverse the constitutive abstraction of scientific rationalism is the key idea in the notion of spiritual experience. The

analysis to follow will argue, first, that an understanding of Adorno's employment of this idea as a philosophical strategy can be properly gleaned through the discussion of Proust's literary technique. Proust, Adorno believes, manages to construct a valuable technique to reverse the transformation of experience into a *déchet*, the colorless classifiable item. The point of this technique is to recover what Proust calls the *racine personelle* (personal root) of our experiences (1999a, 2281). Second, I will argue that the problem of language as expression is central to Proust's literary project. Like Adorno (and Benjamin), Proust's intention is to recover the capacity of language to function as expression, in contrast to its purely communicative function. But what makes Proust's treatment of this idea uniquely insightful is its focus on the depth of subjective experience as the locus of what is to be rescued, by finding a way to bring subjective experience to language.

The Depths of Experience

À la recherche du temps perdu, Proust's *magnum opus*, represents, for Adorno, an ambitious literary struggle to recover spiritual experience. I suggested that we think of this idea as the surrounding of the thing with subjective meanings, in which the manifold chains of meaning that link a thing to its historical context provide the key to deciphering its significance. Under the conditions of disenchantment, however, spiritual experience becomes problematic. Language comes to be increasingly characterized by the dissolution of the traces of subjective experience from the concept. Conceptual thinking thereby becomes a tool for the classification of particulars, their comprehension in terms of fixed and unambiguous inferential relations shorn of the resonances that mark its encounter by a subject. The object thereby becomes identifiable in an ideally subject-free fashion. What kind of thing it *is*, now gets split off from *how* it is experienced.

For Proust, a reality emptied of subjective meaning in this way becomes "the refuse [*déchet*] of experience" (1999a, 2280). When words become simple counters for the classification of things, the common element formed by the subtraction of the particularity of any possible encounter, what we are left with is not genuine reality, but its refuse, or waste. Conventional knowledge (*la connaissance conventionnelle*) takes us away from reality because it disengages us from "what we have really experienced" (p. 2284). The task of the artist is to reverse this movement by a "return to the depths [*retour aux profondeurs*]" where "what really existed dwells within us" (p. 2285). The tenor of these remarks is mirrored perfectly in Adorno's statement of his philosophical task as the expression of "what I experience as something essential about the world [*was ich an der Welt als etwas Wesentliches erfahre*]" (1973, 83).[4] Adorno's recognition

of Proust's literary work as a model for the recovery of spiritual experience is based on this commonality. The philosopher, Adorno claims, does not at all seek "the truth as something pertaining to an object [*Gegenständliches*] in the usual sense; but rather tries to express his own experience by means of concepts" (p. 81). Unless these remarks are situated in their proper theoretical context, they are liable to mislead (or be misunderstood). Adorno is certainly not arguing that we privatize philosophical language, as though it should be seen first and foremost in terms of its exclusively personal resonance.[5] Quite the opposite, in fact: Adorno is suggesting that the experience of the subject is the key that unlocks the truth about concepts. By using the power of the subject, negative dialectic is able to make concepts function as expression, besides their role in communicating a fixed content. This dependence of philosophy on saturation with the experience of the subject explains Adorno's insistence on the ever-present potential of philosophy "going astray" (1966, 25). Philosophy, Adorno claims, has no protection against the risk of a "deviation into what is arbitrary" (p. 45). There is no "method" that can guarantee philosophy about the essential, nonarbitrary character of its interpretive work. Because the truth about the world depends entirely on the interpretation of the resonance it bears for a subject, there can be no "neutral" position, that is, no position outside of subjective experience, from which to evaluate philosophical truth. It is the same risk of failure that Proust's narrator experiences in his speechlessness before the hawthorns, and the line of trees at Balbec (1999a, 116–17, 569). The attempt to spiritualize experience cannot get off the ground here, and the world remains opaque. I want now to look a little more closely at the origins of this idea of experience in Proust's literary strategy.

Proust's search for meaning beyond the surface of things, the illusory world of reduced experience, is often taken to be a form of Platonism.[6] However Proust's employment of this idea is significantly different from an idealism of the Platonic variety. As Anne Henry has argued, the Proustian "essence" is not a pure ideality, but instead a "qualitative essence that is always incarnated" (1981, 277). That is to say, Proust understands essence to be an intensification of the significance of reality. Essence is not something that, so to speak, floats above reality. It is something that dwells within it, and that one gets access to by penetrating beneath the surface of what is given. Anne Simon has described this as a dialectical approach that "makes of essence the precarious and ephemeral result of an *act* of linkage where real and ideal no longer oppose one another" (2000, 55). Essence, in other words, is not the culling of a stable, unchangeable property from the flux of change. What Proust intends by essence is of a different order entirely. For Proust, essence is to be read out of the distinctive qualitative dimensions of the thing as it presents itself before a subject in an experience. This means that essence cannot be obtained through an abstraction from the subject's encountering of the

thing; it is rather brought to the surface by the more precise investigation of this encounter.[7] Even the most mundane objects present possibilities for an interpretive encounter of this sort. Hence the narrator's statement that

> [A]ll of a sudden a roof, a gleam of the sun on a stone, the odor of a path made me stop due to the particular pleasure they offered, and also because they seemed to be hiding something behind what I was seeing, something that they were inviting to come and take possession of and that in spite of my efforts I could not discover it. . . . [They] had seemed to me to be full, ready to unfurl themselves, to hand over to me that of which they were only a covering. (1999a, 147)

In the Hegelian terms that Adorno takes over, the mundane items of which the narrator speaks, a roof, a stone, an odor, are mediated immediacies. Or in other words, they are thought constructions in which the process that prepares them as brute particulars has "vanished" in them. Adorno describes the nature of this insight in Hegel in the following passage:

> [Hegel] demolished the thesis of mere immediacy as the basis of knowledge and opposed the empiricist concept of experience without glorifying the given as the bearer of meaning. It is characteristic of his method that he evaluated immediacy by its own criterion and charged it with not being immediate. . . . [I]mmediacy always already contains something other than itself—subjectivity—without which it would not be "given" at all, and by that token it is already not objectivity. (1993b, 58–59)

Read along these lines, the promise that Proust's narrator detects in these mundane objects is that of penetrating their immediacy, essentially by reanimating the subjective resonances that had to be eliminated for them to appear as blind particulars. Immediacy can be seen as the opacity of items of experience, their failure to resonate, or to draw the subject into them. The subject must draw on how experience strikes him or her to get beyond the semblance of immediacy that surrounds worldly items. But mediation does not stop with the subject, and this is the pivotal idea that will enable Adorno to use the Proustian procedure in the social-critical form of a negative dialectic. The subject uses the force of its own responses and reactions to break through the shell of immediacy, finding what is uniquely subjective at the very heart of the object. But now we can just as well reverse this statement, and say that in the depths of the subject, we will find the truth about the object. The subject is no more a first principle than the object; the more we dig deeper into the subject,

the more we will find the social-historical world that is supposed to be opposed to it. The circle of mediation is therefore complete because every attempt to interpret the object reflects back on the subject, and every effort to interpret the subject draws one toward the objective world that makes that subject what it is. Another way of saying this is that "the forms that epistemology considers to constitute knowledge" in fact depend "on the content of knowledge and vice-versa" (1993b, 65). The standpoint in which (subjective) form and (objective) content are conceived as independent to one another is for Adorno a consequence of the self-circumscription of thinking. The solution to this is therefore to read "subjective" form back into objective history, and given, immediate content back into the subjective mediation (the history of the withdrawal of the subject).

The goal of the artist, on the Proustian view, is to recover the temporal, sensible and imaginative horizons forming the deeper reality of items of experience. The narrator of the *Recherche*, as Anne Simon puts this, "endeavors to express the fact that the surface of things is haunted, inflated by their own materiality, by the world that surrounds them, and by subjective beliefs" (2000, 220). Mediation therefore returns the thing to its context, or better: it returns the context *to the thing*, because its insertion into various relations of significance is inseparable from the truth of the thing itself. What is important here is that one cannot, for Proust, abstract these forms of significance from the quality of the experience in which they are embedded. The sense is precisely the sense *of* the experience, rather than a free-floating form contingently attached to an appearance.[8] What Proust is after is a notion of experience in which sense does not figure as a separable quality that is somehow instantiated in an item of experience. This way of looking at cognitive experience, I suggested, recapitulates the logic of exchange value in the realm of sense.[9] In opposition to the essence or universal formed by abstraction, Proust views essence as what becomes visible in the arrangement of elements.

In *le temps retrouvé*, Proust speaks of the "extreme difference that exists between the true impression that we have had of a thing and the factual impression that we give to ourselves" in trying to represent it (1999a, 2264). The work of the intelligence in trying to represent a thing is one of subtraction. Here, Proust is making the same point as Bergson. However, for Proust, it is the relations of significance stemming from the thing's availability for a subject in experience that are subtracted. Proust's way of expressing this mirrors perfectly Adorno's Hegelian claim about mediation.

> [T]he difference that exists between each of our real impressions . . . would be attributable to the fact that the most insignificant speech that we have uttered at a certain epoch of our lives, the most insignificant gesture that we have made was surrounded, bore on its surface

> the reflection of things which logically were not attached to it, were separated from it by the intelligence which did not have any use for them for the needs of rationality. (p. 2264–65)

To reconstruct the sense that was subtracted from the object, the artist must access the different threads of meaning linking a thing with its context. This means using the experiencing subject to re-create the way in which a thing's features link it inextricably to its surroundings, those noninferential relations that establish its human significance. This is why the truth of an act or gesture always seems to be buried beneath its surface, as if "locked up in a thousand sealed jars, of which each would be filled with things of an absolutely different color, odor, temperature" (p. 2265). The universal emerges in this process from the tentative exploration of the subjective resonances of the lines and features of the particular thing; instead of the subsumption of a property under a general concept, it is the construction of a universal by deciphering the web of relations in which the thing stands. Proust provides an exemplary description of this process.

> Since I heard my great-aunt pronounce [the names of Roussainville or Martinville] so often over the table in the dining room, they had acquired a certain somber charm to which had perhaps blended themselves the extracts of the taste of jam, the odor of firewood and the paper of a book by Bergotte, the sandstone color of the house opposite. (p. 526)

All of these resonances are inextricably personal, and seem to go right to the center of the individual, experiencing subject. But they also create a context that exhibits a social scene. It is the same type of interpretive practice that Adorno (1974d) finds exhibited in Ernst Bloch's discussion of the pitcher, where Bloch reads this seemingly mundane object as a cipher of social-historical experience.[10] The basic idea is that the more the subject is able to draw out its reactions to an experiential item, the more it will be able to recover its historical truth by multiplying the moments where it is reflected in other things. The point is to create a general idea by the arrangement of these moments around the experiential item, constructing what Adorno calls a "force field" (1970a, 79). This metaphor portrays the interpretive process as one that expands outward, drawing seemingly incongruous materials (the taste of jam, the firewood) into its orbit. Adorno believes that this idea provides the key to reading social phenomena. At some point, the construction of a universal in this fashion will come upon society, as the figure that finally organizes the significance of all the other elements. In this way, society becomes accessible in the form of spiritual experience. It is what Adorno calls the "unregimented"

quality of this sort of experience, which involves using the experiential engagement of the subject to open up multiple lines of contact with an item, that enables it to disclose truths about the world that are inaccessible on an empiricist understanding of experience (as an encounter with something "given" that is "outside" the subject).

In an essay on John Ruskin, Proust argues that Ruskin's procedure is neither a realism (reducible to imitation of what is given) nor an intellectualism (its translation into a separable idea) but rather one in which the reality captured is "at the same time material and intellectual" (1999b, 111). That is to say, "the matter is real because it is an expression of mind [*esprit*]." What is significant about this description is the way that spiritual moments are thought to be legible on the surface of things: "If [Ruskin] attaches such important to the look [*aspect*] of things, this is because it alone reveals their deeper nature" (p. 112). As the outlines of a tree reveal the baneful trees that have cast it aside, the winds that have tormented it, "[t]he configuration of a thing is not simply the image of its nature, it is the word of its destiny and the trace of its history." Proust is outlining here a form of interpretation that seeks a union of subjective experience and materiality at the surface, on the appearance of things. The "spiritual" element that corrects a superficial realism is in fact none other than the thing's configuration, the history of its relations with other things and the outline of its possibilities. Its contextual character as a thing constituted by its temporal entwinement with other things is thus written on its surface.

The artistic practice Proust sees exemplified in Ruskin is one in which the context is read out of the experiential item. In this way, the universal, or the "idea" is elicited by tracing the perceptible (or sensorial) features of the thing. Its sense, or what the thing is, is ascertained by decoding what is written on its exterior. It is therefore an exemplary depiction of spiritual experience as a process that reads the whole out of the particular. Thus "Ruskin did not separate the beauty of cathedrals from the charm of these landscapes from which they emerge" (1999b, 122). This is the configuration of the thing rendered perceptible. Here, the manifold interactions of an item with its environment are seen as written into its features, inseparable from what makes it the kind of thing it is. The artist is able in this way to make the universal one that is expressed *in* the particular, and amenable to that type of exact description that tries to trace the contours of the thing as precisely as possible, trying to say what it *is* rather (as habitual classification) than what it falls under (Adorno 1966, 152). Here, the spiritual is integrated seamlessly into the material elements; it is decipherable as the arrangement of material elements themselves. As in the case of *mémoire involontaire* (so I shall argue shortly) the routine operations of classificatory thinking are suspended by these depictions, as things seem to exceed their fixed borders and blend with their surroundings.

It is this capacity of things to express general meanings through the qualitative configuration of their elements that is the core of spiritual experience. In his 1965–66 lectures on negative dialectic Adorno puts this point as follows:

> The motor of such a kind of experience, what drives a human being to have these spiritual experiences—and this alone is the concern of philosophy—is the admittedly unwarranted, vague, and obscure expectation that each individual and particular that comes before it will finally represent [*vorstelle*]—I'm using Lebiniz's terms: that whole [*Ganze*] within itself that always slips away from it, more in the sense of a pre-stabilized disharmony, which reveals itself in such an experience, than in the sense of the thesis of harmony that has accompanied experience in the big rationalist systems. (2003a, 124)

Adorno is claiming that the type of perception that Proust finds in artistic representation reflects the same sort of experience that should be the goal of the philosophical concept. The "whole" that is revealed from out of the particular, as the expression "pre-stabilized disharmony" (a modification of Leibniz's prestabilized harmony of the monads) suggests, will be one that is riven with antagonisms.

Involuntary Memory

I now want to look more closely at how, supposedly, language is supposed to be able to recover spiritual experience within discursive concepts. I want to take this up, first, by returning to the point I made in the discussion of Bergson's notion of *habitude*. I noted there that memory, for Adorno, plays an important role in the possibility of the critical self-reflection of concepts. Proust's notion of *mémoire involontaire* (involuntary memory), I suggest, is crucial to Adorno's efforts to justify the assertion that the recovery of spiritual experience is possible *within* the concept, rather than, as with Bergson, *via* the postulation of a separate form of cognition. I now want to spell out this argument in more detail. I will then return to the question of Adorno's quest for a kind of language use that would allow for the expression of spiritual experience.

In a short essay on Proust, Adorno noted that Proust had been able to remain true to undiminshed experience (*ungeschmälerte Erfahrung*) because he had "constructed a technique to resist the automation and technicization of his own thinking" (1974b, 673). Proust, Adorno is claiming, had found a way to resist the atrophy of language into pure classification, the evisceration of the moment of expression from the linguistic sign, by working within language to recover a broader accessibility of experience. Involuntary memory, I will argue,

provides a model for a type of interpretation, the point of which would be to disclose the experiential conditions of concepts. Since these conditions concern the experience that impresses itself *in* concepts, and not the content that is communicated with them, they cannot be said with concepts, but rather they become accessible in a momentary recognition that discloses a concept as an experiential surface. My claim is that this is what Adorno's interpretive procedure takes from the notion of *mémoire involontaire*. I prepared the ground for this idea in the previous chapter's discussion of Adorno's employment of the idea of a "blind spot" that becomes accessible in a shimmer or a flash (1970a, 53–54). Adorno comes close to the notion of involuntary memory in his reference to an "awakening" that takes shape as the awareness of the inner history of disenchantment (1970a, 34). *Mémoire involontaire* thus becomes the figure for a process in which concepts are read in terms of what they express rather than what they say. What is disclosed "in a flash" is the dependence of the concept on historical experience as a condition of its meaning.

I suggested that, for Bergson, memory is, in the final analysis, always subordinated to the demands of practical imperatives. Hence Bergson never finally succeeds in freeing memory from the stultifying operation of habit. Proust shares Bergson's view that a genuine experience of the thing can be recovered only by overcoming the utilitarian framework of practical activity, what the narrator refers to as the "heavy veil" of habit (1999a, 2013). At one point, the narrator of *la Recherche* refers to habit, *habitude*, as a "second nature" that "prevents us from knowing the first [nature]" (p. 1325).[11] Words and concepts, used as routine tools of identification, the dreary practice of classifying things by extracting a mark or property common to a number of particulars, supplant in habit the interpretation of what is expressed by words in language. The narrator suggests that words are significant only if they are interpreted "in the manner of an influx of blood to the face of an anxious individual" (p. 1668). The point here is that the expressive force of words is to be found in their capacity to evoke an experiential context. Even the most seemingly inconsequential words (such as the *justement* of Mr. De Cambremer) become ciphers that disclose the interaction of human ambitions and desires within a social context. *Mémoire involontaire* denotes the moment when undiminished experience breaks through the anaesthetizing force of habit, returning to words that saturation with experience that is obscured by their reduction to classificatory devices. What makes this possible is something that Bergson had left out of account in his theory of memory, namely, the role of forgetting. Normally, as Proust's narrator puts it, we are led, or pulled (*entraîné*) by habit out of the grasp of our sensibility, absorbing from words only what remains after the extraction of all points of view (p. 423). *Mémoire involontaire* erupts into consciousness as something entirely outside, or independent of the

framework of everyday action and (reduced) experience. The first appearance of involuntary memory, the infamous madeleines episode, stresses its emergence in, seemingly, entirely contingent details (here we should recall Husserl's 'towers of thought')—such as the "crisp and plump cakes" that recall Combray for the narrator, tied to material objects.

The important feature of this account, as far as the elucidation of spiritual experience is concerned, is that involuntary memories shock the individual out of the routine of habit, producing a jarring contrast with everyday cognitive schemes. In the working of involuntary memory, something is "unanchored at a great depth [*à une grande profondeur*]" (1999a, 45). Because they are wholly outside of the instrumentally useful, involuntary memories can illuminate habitual understandings, temporarily, as if from the outside. In this way, they provide a form of distanciation from the everyday forms of classification. Involuntary memory furnishes those sudden eruptions of momentary awareness of the constricted nature of our everyday cognitive schemes, and it is here that spiritual experience finds its way in to the disenchanted concept. What makes this possible is the potential of the item concerned to evoke an experiential context. Rather than "standing in for" a content, the item that triggers involuntary memory expresses the total context on its surface, as though it has opened itself out to the subject.

I am suggesting that the notion of experience in involuntary memory, as opposed to the everyday work of habitual classification, can be seen as a model for the recovery of experience in Adorno's theory of philosophical interpretation. Adorno's assertion that philosophy must "break epistemology open" (1993b, 66) presages a way of reading concepts that is modeled on the narrator's experience before the *Petites Madeleines*, the uneven cobblestones, the sound of the spoon against a plate, or the sensation of a napkin (the last three episodes forming the culmination of the Proustian great arc of remembrance). Adorno's statement that cognition partakes of tradition as "unconscious memory" (1966, 63) references the possibility of opening up concepts to the historical experience expressed within them. However, it must be reiterated that involuntary memories, because they *are* involuntary, cannot of themselves delineate a process for the recovery of experience. Adorno believes that philosophy can approximate the experience of involuntary memory through the employment of language in presentation.

Mémoire involontaire involves the lighting up "in a flash" (the narrator speaks of *la durée d'un éclair* [1999a, 2267]) of what cannot be said with concepts—the tools of the intelligence. It therefore encapsulates that moment of self-distanciation integral to self-reflection. Proust's narrator refers to the "dizzy spell"—*l'étourdissement*—provoked by involuntary memory (p. 2269). Our everyday cognitive schemes cannot assimilate it, and so we end up stumbling back and forth between them and the disconcerting images of the past.

This capacity of an experience to destabilize our routine forms of classification—furnishing a glimpse of their own inadequacy and triggering a struggle to find the words for the experience—is exactly what Adorno is getting at with the notion of the *Schwindelerregend*—the dizzying, or vertiginous.

> Traditional thinking and the habits of common sense [*Gewohnheiten des gesunden Menschenverstandes*] that it left behind after passing away philosophically, demand a frame of reference[12] in which everything will find its place. . . . As opposed to that, cognition that wants to come to fruition will throw itself, *à fond perdu*, to the objects. The dizziness that this provokes is an *index veri*; the shock of the open, the negativity, as which it necessarily appears within the covered and never changing. (1966, 43)

The assertion here that dizziness is an index of truth emphasizes the point that in this case cognition is pulled up short by experience. The "shock of the open" is the momentary appearance (the shimmering, or flashing) *within* concepts of their dependence on something that cannot be assimilated as a categorizable content; rather than merely ordering a world in classification, concepts here momentarily disclose it through expression. Elsewhere, Adorno speaks of the rigidity of conceptual classification (that is, its closing itself off to the moment of expression) as "molluscan"—the mollusc-like (2003a, 121). Thinking can break out of its molluscan shell by "giving itself over" (*sich überlassen*) to the objects, "without reservation," or even "without a lifebelt," allowing its categories to open themselves to the contours of what is experienced (p. 189).

Adorno expresses the self-reflective potential of this idea by saying that "in involuntary memory [*unwillkürliche Erinnerung*] the voluntary thought attempts, even if in vain, to heal the wounds of what at the same time it must perpetrate" (1970a, 54). This is not meant to imply that the whole thing is a hopeless exercise. Adorno is rather calling attention to the point that the self-correction of thinking is a ceaseless process, and this is because of the inherent tendencies of our conceptual language to congeal into the petrified structures of *habitude*. Although Proust's involuntary memory dramatizes this process, it is one that we can think of as integral to language. Adorno's constant reminders that concepts are entwined with a nonconceptual whole, hence are not self-contained units of meaning, is a call for thinking to build this self-correction and self-criticism into its everyday operation. Hence Adorno's stress on "idiosyncratic exactness in the choice of words" (1966, 61). How one must think, Adorno here claims, "has its distant and blurred image in names that are not categorially cast over the thing." What he wants to say is that conceptual cognition can embody

within itself a process of self-correction that makes it open for new or unassimilable experiences, such as those furnished by the involuntary memory. These experiences are ones that open up the concept, and confront it momentarily with what lies outside it. I now want to look more closely at how language is able, indirectly, to recover the moment of expression. Language, I will suggest, is able to recover something of the disclosive force of involuntary memory through the process of its self-correction.

Expression, Suffering, Allegory

As tools that are designed to serve the domination of nature, or that is to say, the use of nature for instrumental purposes, concepts in their routine operation tend to reduce experience to what can be incorporated in stable, fixed categories. This reflects a certain historical development in which, in order to make possible the classification of particulars in rigid concepts, the subjective immersion in experience must be increasingly eliminated from the understanding of the cognitive significance of experience. This is the structure of disenchantment that Adorno believes is expressed (although it cannot be said) within the concept. What Proust, and also Bergson theorize as *habitude* is, for Adorno, the weight of a certain historical development that expels the experiencing subject from cognition. Of course it is only through a certain formation of the subject (that is, the process in which the subject *becomes* constitutive subjectivity) that the reduction of cognition to conceptual classification becomes possible.[13] This is why the recovery of experience must take the form of a type of process that uses the subject to "break out" of the confinement that the role of the subject in cognition has come to resemble. Through the recovery of experience, as we saw, Adorno in fact claims to be able to reveal the truth about the constituting subject, that is, its origin in the self-constriction of the subject, which leads to the social-historical condition of disenchantment. In this way, the subject is able to come to a reflection on its own conditionedness. I now want to make explicit the connection between the emergence of *Selbstbesinnung* as the goal of negative dialectic and the features of Proust's literary technique.

In his critique of the symbolists, Proust argues that names are never entirely reducible to pure classificatory devices (1999c, 96). Each word is said to possess "a power of evocation at least as large as its power of strict signification." Proust speaks in this regard of the "ancient and mysterious affinities" between the mother tongue and our sensibility that make it more like a "latent music" and distinguish it from the conventional nature of foreign languages. A similar critique of the thesis of the arbitrary nature of the sign is also, as we saw, the cornerstone of Benjamin's ruminations on the expressive nature of

language. Adorno also takes it up explicitly in his early reflections on the "Theses on the Language of the Philosopher."[14] Proust here presents the distinction between expression and communication as one of evocation versus (strict) signification. It is no surprise that Proust's narrator (here furnishing the model for Benjamin) refers to the "obligation and task" of the writer as those of a "translator" (1999a, 2281). The goal of literary technique therefore becomes that of using language to evoke what, in the employment of signs as strict tools of signification, cannot be directly said. Proust's narrator experiences this failure of language to put experience into words in shrieking "zut, zut, zut" on seeing the reflection of a cloud on a pond (p. 129). The writer as translator is obliged to construct a technique that is able to resist the severance of communication (or signification) from expression. The point is to recover the meanings through which the world is disclosed to the subject, buried beneath the encrustations of *amour-propre*, passion, intelligence, and *habitude* (p. 2285).[15] As well as inherently a work of resistance, translation is also a work of reconstruction. It must begin its work with signs whose conventional employment obscures their evocative force; signs that are subject to the corrosive power of *habitude*. The measure of success is therefore the extent to which it is able to subvert the movement of habitual language toward pure signification.

Proust's ability to carry this off, Adorno believes, was due to his employment of a literary technique to capture the expressive element of language. In a letter to Thomas Mann, Adorno (1993b, 84) describes this technique as a form of exact description.

> One would almost think that there is not a simple opposition between the permeation of the work with subjectivity and the demands of realism . . . but that instead the greater the precision one maintains with regard to the historical details . . . the more likely one is to achieve spiritualization and attain the world of the *imago*. I first arrived at these eccentric thoughts by way of Proust, who in this regard reacted with idiosyncratic exactness.

Proust's idiosyncratic exactness does undoubtedly harbor something of the desire of the phenomenological enterprise to return to the thing itself free of theoretical obfuscation. However, what is of crucial significance as far as Adorno is concerned is that Proust never forgets that he is employing the tools of the intelligence. Therefore he does not fall into the Husserlian error of hypostatizing the content of concepts *as* immediate experience. Or to put this in Adorno's own terms, Proust is able to unseal the nonconceptual *with* concepts, without equating concepts to the nonconceptual.

Proust's narrator sometimes describes the possibility of this procedure in terms of a suspension of interest, or a temporary bracketing of *habitude*.

Hence at the Sainte-Euverte *soirée*, the faces of the guests suddenly cease to function for Swann as "practically useful signs for the identification of a person who represented for him up to that moment a cluster of pleasures to pursue, annoyances to avoid, or courtesies to be rendered" (1999a, 262). Instead, the traits of these faces are now seen as coordinated solely "by aesthetic relationships, in the autonomy of their lines." Even the most insignificant details, like the gentlemen's monocles, now each appear "with a kind of individuality" (p. 263). One gives to its wearer a certain "melancholic sensitivity," another is "surrounded by a giant ring, like saturn," and another, placed on "a big carp's head with round eyes," is worn like a detached fragment of the glass of an aquarium. Exact description, the narrator seems to be suggesting, is opposed to the interest-driven logic of habitual classification. The result gives a nice illustration of Adorno's claim about the lack of an opposition between the permeation with subjectivity and realism. The narrator's descriptions capture reality precisely because they manage to resist the move to the general categorizations of constitutive subjectivity. It is the organization of cognition through constitutive subjectivity, for Adorno that takes the subject out of the cognitive engagement with the world. We can see another example of the idea of exact description in the episode concerning the Martinville steeples.[16] Proust's narrator provides two versions of this event, the first of which reveals the work of intellectual processing that dispels subjective reactions as optical illusions (pp. 148–50). The second, as Joshua Landy has argued, is the event "as it is initially experienced, filtered through a standard human subjectivity at a particular set of spatiotemporal positions" (2004, 58). This second version uses exact description once again to spiritualize the item experienced, describing the steeples as "rising" towards the sky, "throwing themselves" in front of the carriage, appearing to "wave goodbye." The pleasure that the narrator experiences after composing this description is once again tied to the idea that something about the world finds its way into language through this sort of exact description.

We can understand this, I suggest, if we think of exact description as tying the work of the intelligence and its concepts to the moment of language as expression. It is not that we are supposed to take seriously that the steeples wave good-bye, or that one of the guests at the Sainte-Euverte salon is a fish. What Proust's narrator is trying to do is to construct a series of metaphorical image-chains that redirect language-as-communication toward experience. To put this another way, the extended metaphoric chains constitute a process of perpetual self-correction of the intelligence, or a writing that takes shape as a resistance to the usurping of language as expression by the tendency toward habitual classification. Unlike in the case of Bergson, the Proustian procedure stays within the concept, and seeks out the nonconceptual by using concepts to correct one another, thereby forming an image that manages to express

something about the experiential item beyond what is communicated in its concept. The extended metaphoric chains, as Kristeva puts it, are intended to "guide the surface of signs towards depth" (1996, 213). This is achieved by the way that exact description manages to link together what is separated in the dividing, abstracting work of the intelligence. The superimposed connections and similarities form an image of what does not find its way in to the surface of signs. But (and this is important) exact description recovers expression only *through* the self-critique of the intelligence; or to use Adorno's words, it does not cover the nonconceptual with concepts, but preserves the difference.

The impressionist painter, Elstir, provides another angle for thinking about the process of exact description in *À la Recherche*. The narrator's descriptions suggest that Elstir's paintings are bound up with the intention to retract the judgment of intelligence on what is genuinely experienced, namely that it is largely an "error." This, of course, is the abolition of the subject that occurs in the construction of constitutive subjectivity. In Elstir's procedure, the sensible is to be made visible as it reveals itself, prior to its fracturing into isolated elements, and the subsequent deflating of its significance, by the classificatory function of the concept. The narrator describes his experience in Elstir's studio as follows:

> [T]he charm of each one [of Elstir's paintings] consisted in a sort of metamorphosis of the things represented, analogous to that which, in poetry, one calls metaphor, and that if God the Father had created things in giving them a name, it was in discarding their name, or in giving them a different one that Elstir recreated them. The names that designate things always respond to a notion of the intelligence foreign to our true impressions, and which forces us to eliminate from them everything that does not relate to this notion. (1999a, 656)

Proust's narrator here describes the process whereby the names given to things by the intelligence, the petrified counters that identify a thing outside of any possible experience of it, are erased, as things are renamed, "metamorphosed" in a return to the depth of experience of things. Essentially, as Vincent Descombes has suggested, Elstir offers a solution to a problem of language that is posed in the same fashion for the writer and artist (1987, 281).[17] The narrator's discovery is that words must be used differently in order to account for the experience of things. The impressionist painter's ability to make one thing look like another suggests for the writer a way of using words such that an experience becomes visible *in* them. The "metamorphosis" that Elstir's paintings effect has its counterpart in language as metaphor, which redirects words toward the experience expressed in them, by renaming them.

I have been speaking of Proust's literary technique as directed toward the recovery of the expressive moment of language. I argued that Proust's distinction between evocation and signification functions in a similar fashion to Adorno's distinction between expression and communication, and that Proust wants to redirect language toward what is evoked, but not explicitly said in any signification. I now want to tie Proust's technique more explicitly to Adorno's idea of spiritualization as a form of *Selbstbesinnung*, in which language expresses its dependence on historical experience. Adorno argues that the measure of spiritual experience is "what subjects experience objectively as their suffering" (1966, 172). It is the capacity of language to express more than it says that enables it to "bring the suffering of the world to language" (2003a, 158). Spiritual experience, Adorno is arguing, is the experience of the withering of experience in the course of disenchantment. It brings to language the historical experience that underlies the transformation of language into an empty vehicle of communication (or pure signification).

An idea of art as the expression of suffering is of course one of the major themes of *À la Recherche*.[18] It is suffering, the narrator suggests, that "puts into motion" the literary task (1999a, 2295). The *profondeurs* (depths) to which the artist seeks to return are composed of the experience of suffering. While there are important differences between Proust's delineation of this idea in terms of the goal of art, and Adorno's understanding of the expression of suffering as a philosophical task, I want here to focus on the similarity it sets up in conceiving of the goal of art/philosophy as self-reflection. More specifically, Adorno follows Proust's narrator in conceiving of self-reflection as the moment of liberation that occurs when the suffering of the world is put into words. As he puts this in negative dialectic, "[t]he need to let suffering speak is the condition of all truth" (1966, 29). Here is how Proust's narrator formulates this idea, by way of the notion of art as the expression of "ideas."

> Ideas are the successors of griefs [*chagrins*]; at the moment in which the latter transform themselves into ideas, they lose a part of their harmful action on our heart, and further, in the first instant, the transformation itself suddenly releases a feeling of joy. (p. 2293)

The pleasure generated in this experience suggests again that what comes to the surface here is a truth, or an insight that cannot find its way into language as pure signification. This is because language as pure signification is subject to the work of *habitude* as a "second nature" that categorizes the world in accordance with the instrumental logic of day-to-day interests. The role of art in creating ideas unravels the "ingeniousness of the intelligence in shielding us from suffering" (p. 1330). The expression of suffering cannot be understood in the terms of habitual classification, since it draws attention to an experience

that itself structures the workings of language, leading to the gradual evisceration of its expressive moment and its consequent subordination to the forms of *habitude*. Suffering is expressed *in* the very loss of expressiveness of language, but it cannot be said through it. For the narrator of *À La Recherche*, true reality is the result of a "spiritual operation," and hence "we only truly know what we are obliged to recreate in thought" (p. 1337). This statement foregrounds the nature of the artistic process as one of reconstruction, disclosing the truth by assembling the elements that illuminate the world's meaning. Suffering cannot be reduced to either an objective or a psychic component. To understand its suffering, the subject must grasp the structure of the world, but understanding this structure directs it back toward the history of the subject.

If, as David Ellison (1984) has argued, the deconstruction of possession-taking is at the core of the Proustian narrative, it is perhaps in the notion of suffering that this thematic finds its most fruitful development. The long reflections on jealousy as a need to possess the object of desire, to subordinate it to the self, provide a dramatic visualization of this idea in the latter sections of the novel. The narrator tries to secure himself against the possibility of suffering by (quite literally) locking up the object of his desire. Rather than coming to terms with suffering, this strategy simply replicates the Schopenhauerian oscillation between suffering and *ennui* (1999a, 1899). There is a parallel here with the intelligence, which seeks mastery over the meaning of its experiential content. The desire to possess here becomes sublimated as the general need to control nature for the purposes of practical interests.[19] This is not a thesis about the metahistory of thinking, but is rather to be understood as claiming that those schemes for organizing experience which serve certain practical needs, over time, become sedimented in the subject as habit.[20] Without the process being at any stage governed by an overarching teleological scheme, the habitual classifications that enable subjects to capture objects in terms of their usefulness begin to usurp the broader cognitive interest in knowing things. Proust's narrative, like Adorno's negative dialectic, wants to resist the work of habitual classification through bringing the failure of cognition as possession to self-awareness. Instead of seeking in vain to secure itself against suffering through possession, the subject brings to self-consciousness the origin of its suffering in the overgrown practical interest in control. The pleasure that the narrator of *À La Recherche* associates with the aesthetic would therefore be the pleasure that originates in finding a name for suffering, or the potential to put it into words. This, I am suggesting, would be the right way to read Adorno's notion of *Selbstbesinnung*, or self-reflection. It brings to self-awareness what is presupposed by the operation of our everyday conceptual schemes. It is not a canceling of those schemes in a return to the cognitive fullness of the object. Rather, it discloses the distance between our concepts and genuine cognition, *and that distance is what generates suffering*.[21]

In order to be able to disclose that distance, language must be able to express (or evoke) what it cannot say; to *say* it would abolish the distance, and eliminate the suffering. It was this capacity of language to bring to expression the loss of cognitive experience that, we saw, Walter Benjamin identifies as the governing motif in Baroque allegorical drama. What is distinctive about allegory, it was argued, is its refusal to sacralize the "fallen" sign. To put this another way, allegory resists the fusion of signifying language and what it attempts to signify. But in the process, allegory is able to bring to expression the failure of its own language. In the extended allegorical associations of the Baroque, according to Benjamin, language draws attention to its own loss of meaning. I now want to argue that what Adorno refers to as the "penetrating gaze of allegory" (2001, 188) also figures as an important element in Proust's literary technique. In disclosing its own failure to give voice to experience, language under the gaze of allegory gives expression to its separation from undiminished cognitive experience as a form of suffering.

Adorno speaks of Proust's descriptions of aristocratic society as embodying the nature-fallenness of history (*Naturverfallenheit von Geschichte*) (1974a, 209). The transition of history into unredeemable nature stands for the collapse of meaning in allegory; language is demystified where it reveals its own allegorical arbitrariness. A good place to pick up this occurrence in Proust is in the discussion of *la Vierge de Balbec* (1999a, 524). This is the narrator's first visit to the Balbec church, and thus provides an occasion for a first encounter between the name, and that which it is supposed to name. The narrator had previously noted that the name "Balbec" had been filled in imagination with "waves rousing up around a church in the Persian style" (p. 313). Like all names, this one had been inflated with "what my imagination aspired to," and had accumulated "something of dreams." However, the narrator's experience before the church itself is one of a profound disappointment that deflates the magical, dreamlike qualities of the name. The narrator experiences a shock in seeing the *Vierge* "reduced to its own stony appearance," vying for position with "an electoral poster and the point of my cane," rooted to its spot, "unable to escape the gazes of the café and of the bus station," "soiled with the same soot as the neighboring houses." In short, the name is suddenly cast into a series of arbitrary allegorical associations. This finally culminates in the "metamorphosis" of the "immortal" work of art into a "little old lady of stone of which I could measure the height and count the furrows" (pp. 524–25). The historical object (the Balbec church) is thus revealed as *naturverfallen* before the narrator's melancholy gaze. The disenchanting of the name as it becomes filled with arbitrary associations initiates a separation between meaning and being. The meaning that the name had wanted to say cannot be said, and thus language calls attention to its own arbitrariness.

We can see a similar movement at work in the narrator's discussions of the name "Guermantes." Initially, the narrator desires to make the name and "image" coincide (1999a, 145), and expects that the voice of a Guermantes will embody the "amaranthine color" of the last syllable of the name (p. 906). But the narrator soon experiences the deception that the Guermantes "resemble more closely their social peers than their name" (p. 1083). As in the case of Balbec, the Guermantes do not embody the uniqueness and rarity of their name. Following this disenchantment of the name, it becomes filled with a series of allegorical associations that are organized by the intelligence (qualities of physique, skin color, hair shade, etc.). Once again here, the melancholy gaze of the narrator hollows out the sign, taking apart its symbolic unity, and drawing attention to the nature of the name as a ruin. The ancient past of "timber forests and gothic steeples" was now only accessible as if it were a "cause in its effect"; that is to say, "perhaps possible for the intelligence to discern, but in no way visible to the imagination" (p. 1154). This is the separation of meaning and being, in which language reveals its allegorical nature.

This experience of language as ruin, I want to suggest, is key to the idea of *Selbstbesinnung*. What is important in this process is that language holds on to the impulse to say the essence of thing itself (in this case, the essence of the Guermantes clan) while at the same revealing the impossibility of this demand. The refusal of a fulfilled meaning in the melancholy gaze is what sets up the retention of this idea in language as possibility. Allegory is therefore the form in which the failure of language to put experience into words finds its expression. The narrator's exclamation of "zut zut zut" is the simplest occurrence of this expressiveness. It represents what Adorno refers to as "stammering" (1995, 271).[22] The cognitive significance of stammering, Adorno suggests, is that it establishes a tension between the desire to put an experience into words, and the impossibility of carrying this out. I want to suggest that it is this tension that enables the rescue of the thing's essence in the form of hope. When Adorno speaks of the "interior of objects as something at the same time removed from them" (1966, 367), he is talking about this experience in which the essence of an item can be expressed only as what cannot be said.

The lack of identity between name and object is in fact the utopian moment of negative dialectic, on Adorno's view. It uses the force of identity (the striving for coincidence of meaning and being) to break through the semblance of the reality of this identity (the enchantment of the name). However, it preserves the force of identity as an ideal through the (presently impossible) striving to say it. In *Negative Dialectic*, Adorno speaks of the "utopian element" that accompanies the "pragmatic, nature-dominating element" in the simple identifying judgment. It appears in the form of a hope that "*A* should be what it is not yet" (1966, 153). As a "negative sign," Adorno

argues, such hope occurs in the moment when thinking "breaks through" the form of predicative identity. What Adorno is getting at here becomes intelligible if we bear in mind the twin movements of the allegorical perspective which are, first, the destruction of the semblance of the identity of meaning and being (this is the moment in which thought "breaks through" predicative identity) and secondly, the preservation of a fulfilled identity in the form of hope. The expressions of such hope in the philosophical tradition, Adorno asserts, are called "ideas," and they "live in the crevices between what things [*Sachen*] claim to be and what they are." These crevices appear because of the hollowing out of meaning in allegory, which chips away at the claim of the world to embody its meaning.

Metaphor and Contradiction

I argued earlier that metaphor, through its renaming of things, directs language toward expression. I now want to look more closely at the role of metaphor in interrupting the movement of language toward habitual classification.[23] Metaphor works like involuntary memory, first, because it serves to open up an item of experience, inserting it into a context in which different chains of associations begin to illuminate how the thing is; and second, it allows seemingly insignificant features of the context to reveal usually hidden or unremarked features of a thing.[24] Metaphor, furthermore, joins together the "subjective" and "objective" elements of experience by allowing the subject's impressions to develop different points of contact with the object, drawing out the potentialities of meaning written on its surface. Metaphor therefore provides the indispensable rhetorical means for subjectively saturating the object. To achieve this effect, metaphor must somehow resist the (inevitable) tendency to articulate experience in terms of immobile, fixed categories. I want to cite one prominent example from *À La Recherche* where this procedure is foregrounded.

> [O]n certain days the sea seemed to me on the contrary almost rural itself. During the rare days of genuine good weather, the heat had traced on the waters, as if through fields, a white and dusty route behind which the narrow mast of a fishing boat was passing by like a village steeple. A tow boat of which one could only see the smokestack was emitting fumes in the distance like a remote factory, while alone on the horizon, a white patch, no doubt depicted by a sail, but which seemed compact and calcareous, recalled the sun-drenched corner of some isolated building, hospital or school. (1999a, 1347–48)

The potential of metaphor (as employed by in Proust's novel) to redirect language toward what the subject experiences, is inseparable from its ability to subvert the fixed oppositions of habitual classification. Serge Gaubert speaks of networks of sense in which objects undergo changes of quality to the degree to which they are taken up and developed in one network of significations or another (2000, 80–84). Seemingly irreconcilable aspects of reality can be brought to a relationship of mutual illumination through the chains of significance developed within these networks. There occurs what Gérard Genette refers to as a form of "metonymic contagion," by which associations evoke other associations, and eventually embed the original sensation in entirely new contexts of sense (1971, 172). The result here is a disruption of the assertion of fixed identity, the immediately localizable nature of things as points in the conceptual grid. As things are articulated through a metaphorical chain, they are renamed, as their former designations come to seem inadequate or no longer sufficient. Language provides a glimpse of what habitual classification leaves behind; it, so to speak, enables us to *see* that aspect of reality that is not accessible in the habitual organization of experience. Here the land becomes the sea, and the sea becomes land, destabilizing the opposition of these two terms established in habitual inferences. Our concepts cannot *say* that land is sea/sea is land, it cannot articulate the context of meaning uniting these two terms. But language here shows this by disrupting the operation of these terms (or concepts) as fixed, stable classifications.

In his treatment of metaphor, Paul Ricoeur emphasized its potential to create new resemblances that were obscured by previous classificatory systems, and thus its ability to "obliterate" logical frontiers (1975, 251). By creating new kinds of similarity and dismantling the preexisting ordering of relationships among things, metaphor opens a system of habitual classifications to the possibility of transformation. As in the case of involuntary memory (which might be seen as an extended phenomenology of metaphor) metaphor opens up concepts to the blind spot of what cannot be assimilated as a classifiable content. This is the very contingency of habitual classification itself, namely its dependence on historical experience. Metaphor's ability to reveal this dependence of concepts is intelligible if we think of metaphor itself as the process, *in statu nascendi*, of the construction of general concepts. As Ricoeur has argued, metaphor retains within itself the conflict between the previous incompatibility and the new compatibility, or the tension between sameness and difference that undergirds the very structure of likeness. In the metaphoric process, Ricoeur suggests, the movement toward the general is "arrested by the resistance of the difference and, as it were, intercepted by the figure of rhetoric" (1979, 146–47). In terms of Proust's metaphoric technique, we can understand this in terms of the way in which metaphor directs language toward how things appear to the subject, thereby blocking the severance of communica-

tion from the moment of expression. By this means, metaphor is able to create meaning through the interaction of the elements in a metaphoric chain, thus allowing concepts to illuminate each other. The persistence of the awareness of difference in the assertion of commonality means that each classification can be corrected by the position in which it stands to other assertions.

The use of concepts in a process of self-correction, in which their arrangement around an item of experience is able to recover the moment of expression, is what Adorno's call for the rescue of the rhetorical moment in philosophical thinking is all about (1966, 65–66). In philosophical discourse, however, the moment where thinking comes up against the limits of the "sayable" (where, that is, what cannot be said finds its expression) appears in the form of a contradiction. Contradiction, for Adorno, represents the point where the concept is brought face to face with its failure to put experience into words. But although the concept cannot here *say* what it wants to say about experience, it is able to reveal it through what the contradiction shows. As with metaphor, contradiction represents the moment in language that opens out new possibilities of experience. Philosophical thinking, Adorno argues, is able to "think against itself, without abandoning itself" (1966, 144). In the contradiction, the routine operations of thinking are arrested, and thought is called to a reflection on its own practice.

An insight into the role of contradiction in Adorno's negative dialectic can be gleaned from how he differentiates his understanding from Kant and Hegel. For Kant, on the one hand, Adorno argues that contradiction is understood as a "false but correctable" usage of concepts (1966, 245). Essentially, this means that the appearance of contradiction provides evidence that reason has exceeded its limit (or rather contradiction is itself the way in which that limit appears to thinking). For Kant, theses that cannot be safeguarded from contradiction are to be discarded, and hence it is this idea that draws the boundary around the legitimate employment of reason. In Hegel, on the other hand, contradiction is ontologized as the processual nature of the thing itself. It becomes the structure through which thinking develops all partial concepts into the understanding of totality. Truth in Hegel, as Adorno describes it, is "the dynamic totality of all the propositions that can be generated from one another by virtue of their contradictions" (1993b, 12). Adorno's own version rests on a quite subtle correction of these two perspectives. Like Kant, Adorno wants to claim that there is a sense in which contradiction brings thinking up against a limit. But, like Hegel, he wants to say that the occurrence of contradiction must be explained in terms of what thinking is about (the world, or objects), not simply as a limit to thinking. The limit that thought comes up against in contradiction, Adorno wants to claim, is the untruth of its objects. This means that, as Hegel argued, the focus on contradiction must be motivated by the way the world is. But what contradiction captures is not its ontological essence; it is

rather the negative self-reflection of the world, or in other words, the revelation of its failure to live up to its claim to truth. Adorno expresses this point quite nicely when he claims that contradiction is not "simply real," nor is it a "method" (that is, it is not a procedure of thinking, but nor can it be ontologized as the structure of being). Rather, it is the "thinking confrontation of concept and thing" (1966, 148).

In order to make sense of this claim, it is necessary to get clear on Adorno's account of the specific distortion that occurs in the eclipse of the expressive function of language, which is, for Adorno, equivalent to the supplanting of the possibility of undiminished or spiritual experience by reduced or empirical experience. The tendency for the communication of content to usurp expression in philosophical language is sometimes described by Adorno as a process of language's reification. He argues, for example, that "language and the process of reification are interlocked. The very form of the copula, the 'is,' pursues the aim of pinpointing its object, an aim to which philosophy ought to provide a corrective" (1993b, 100).[25] By itself, the tendency of language to fix its object in a judgment is not harmful. It is what enables thought to talk *about* things and refer to them. But it *becomes* harmful when the goal of pinpointing objects by identifying things with concepts begins to undermine the striving of language to express what is given in experience. This of course is what Adorno believes to have occurred in the course of the process of disenchantment. Now a major consequence of this development is a subtle but significant transformation in the operation of concepts. It is useful to elucidate this transformation by way of a comparison with the idea of commodity fetishism. What I want to emphasize about this idea is Marx's description of it as a process in which a quality that attaches to something by virtue of its relation to a certain practice or structure of activity, becomes detached from its dependence on this relation and gets "mystified" by appearing as an inherent property of the thing. As Marx claims, the secret of the commodity form is that it "reflects back to human beings the social characteristics of their own labor as objective characteristics of the products of labor themselves, as social natural-qualities [*Natureigenschaften*] of these things" (1969, 51). It is as though the meanings that accrue to something by virtue of its relation to what is outside it are somehow "spirited into" that thing, as its intrinsic qualities.

Adorno believes that the loss of the expressive function of language parallels exactly the distortion that occurs in commodity fetishism. Concepts, Adorno suggests, have their own form of "fetishism" (1966, 23). They become enchanted when they "lock up the nonconceptual as their meaning." Adorno is saying that the dependence of what concepts mean (their content) on the nonconceptual is somehow removed from the understanding of concepts, and instead of constituting a relation between concepts and what concepts are not,

it is spirited into concepts as an intrinsic property.[26] I said that this was a "subtle" difference because it does not change the content of concepts. Concepts continue to function to describe a world independently of them. However, what gets lost is the sense in which conceptual content depends on the concept's ability to *express* an experiential item that *forms* (or constitutes) its conceptuality. For Adorno, this is the aspect in which the concept is more than merely a type that subsumes a series of tokens as exhibiting an identical feature. As linguistic items that carry an expressive component, concepts also disclose historical experience.

As should be clear, this description of concept fetishism characterizes the notion of cognition as a form of "possession." Adorno often describes this as the *Identitätszwang*, or compulsion of identity. Adorno also refers to it as the "will to identity" that works in every synthesis (1966, 151). Adorno describes this tendency as the ideological moment in thinking. It is this moment that "exempts" concepts from reality, as they are increasingly divested of the qualities of language as expression (p. 23). The goal of negative dialectic is to turn concepts toward an acknowledgment of their dependence. Adorno asserts that "the compulsion of identity would disintegrate before the insight into the constitutive character of the nonconceptual in the concept" (p. 24). This would be the recovery of the nature of conceptual language as a translation of experience, without the inversion that would make of this experience purely and simply a *content* that is asserted in the concept.

The dismantling of the compulsion of identity occurs *within* the enchanted concept as the appearance of contradiction. An important clue to this notion is provided in Adorno's notes for the 1965–66 lectures on negative dialectic. One passage on the contradictory nature of the concept reads: "Contradiction = inadequacy. But with the emphatic character of the concept this becomes contradiction" (2003a, 9). What Adorno means by "inadequacy" is simply the difference that is given in the *relation* between the concept and what it tries to put into words (the relation captured in the nature of language as "translation"). Thus what this passage is saying is that contradiction is the form in which this relation *appears* within a thinking characterized by the dominance of the compulsion of identity (or the eclipse of the moment of expression by communication). As Adorno elaborates in the lectures, "[t]hrough this compulsion of identity, that the forms of our logic exercise on our thinking, that which does not submit to this compulsion necessarily assumes the character of contradiction" (p. 19). For Adorno, therefore, contradiction is the moment when the concept is pulled up short as it is momentarily confronted with its dependence on what is outside it, as the experience on which its meaning is dependent. Contradiction is, in other words, the point of contact between thought and world, the moment in which the real enters into language not as conceptual content, but as expression.

It should be clear, I hope, that contradiction plays a similar role in Adorno's philosophical recovery of experience as *mémoire involontaire* in Proust's literary rescue of the subject. I suggested that *mémoire involontaire* is the moment in which the dependence of language on historical experience is revealed "in a flash," as the disjunction between habitual classification and experience makes itself felt in the experience of the subject. Similarly, contradiction represents for Adorno the moment where the identifying function of concepts is pulled up short, and it is in this moment that identifying thinking becomes aware of its own dependence. This is why, for Adorno, conceptual contradiction is also the untruth of the world. The compulsion of identity recognizes its own dependence on historical experience. It is important to see that it is the *striving* of philosophical thinking to identify that makes it possible for it to generate this self-reflection. It is in this sense that negative dialectic is the attempt to use the compulsion to identity against itself, to bring it to the point where the impossibility of the transformation of the dependence of experience into conceptual content becomes visible *as* the failure of identity. The goal of negative dialectic is to concentrate on the concept until, "through its own meaning, thus its identity, it begins to move, becomes unidentical with itself" (1966, 159). Through its critical reflection in negative dialectic, every concept will be confronted with what it cannot say, or what it can only say by becoming different.

> In that the concept experiences itself as unidentical with its own self and itself under movement, it leads, no longer merely itself, to its other (in Hegel's terminology), without absorbing it. It determines itself through that which is outside it because on its own it does not exhaust itself. As itself it is not at all itself. (p. 159)

The insight that experience exceeds what the concept is able to say suddenly thereby finds its way into critical reflection, as the concept becomes aware that "as itself it is not at all itself." It is this awareness that engenders the need for the concept to change, as it seeks to put the experience into words.

Herbert Schnädelbach (1987) has put forward an important criticism of Adorno in regard to the argument I am trying to articulate about contradiction in negative dialectic. According to Schnädelbach, Adorno commits an error in claiming that all cases of a failure of identity imply contradiction. The root of this error is his failure to distinguish the *is* of predication (identifying something *as* something) and the *is* of identity (identifying something *with* something else).[27] Adorno assumes, according to Schnädelbach, that because in declarative propositions more than identity must be said (since, say, to identify the rose as red is not to identify the rose *with* the property of redness), these statements must be amenable to negative-dialectical analysis of contra-

dictions. The problem with Adorno's argument is said to be that "it is . . . not true that contradictions arise whenever one does not only assert identity" (p. 201). Adorno, according to Schnädelbach, wrongly extends the notion of contradiction to cases involving a simple difference between subject and predicate, or a logical distance between the concept and the individual thing, in short, to any discrepancy between what is asserted and reality, actuality and possibility, or being and what ought to be. Schnädelbach perspicuously asserts that what Adorno has distinguished in these different categories is "critical philosophy as such" (p. 202). All of these sorts of discrepancy contain the latent possibility of a critical attitude towards the given. Therefore to say that they are contradictory (in effect, logically impermissible) is to claim that it is the critical attitude toward experience as such that is ruled out in identity thinking. Further, Schnädelbach notes that this thesis about the critical possibilities of language is understood to be an "intensification of social repression with theoretical means." The unavailability of critical possibilities within language (other than in the form of contradiction) is itself a symptom of the withering of experience, not its cause. We cannot, therefore, separate this claim about language from the broader claims that Adorno wants to make about the constricted structure of experience in modern capitalist societies.

The error in Schnädelbach's critique stems from its misreading of the specific sense in which the striving for identity fails. The nonidentity in the judgment that Adorno wants to recover is simply not captured by Schnädelbach's notion of "identifying as" because is it not *another property*; it is rather the dependence of that identification (as of all conceptual identification) on its expressive component. Nonidentity, rather than a property, is the admission, written on the very features of identity, of its own inadequacy. The ideological component in identity thinking is not simply that it identifies an experiential item *with* a property. The issue is that it inherently abstracts that judgment from its dependence on the experiential context. Adorno's claim is that this dependence must be squeezed out of the judgment in order for it to function as the pinpointing of a pure conceptual content.[28]

Like Jürgen Habermas, Schnädelbach wants to say that the possibility for critical reflection is available in everyday forms of speech. It is only Adorno's misleading characterization of everyday discrepancies in speech as contradictions that makes it look as though the articulation of the nonidentical is impossible in everyday conceptual language. Why, Schnädelbach might well ask, does Adorno think it problematic for our concepts to articulate nonidentity, when this seems to be implied in our everyday propositions that identify something *as* something, while holding open its difference—its not being identical *with* what identifies it? For Schnädelbach, this distinction is one that is obviously implied in everyday language, and therefore does not need any special negative-dialectical technique to unearth it

from the falsifying identifications of concepts. Perhaps the central point at issue here is what it means to have a critical experience. As I have tried to develop through the Proustian idea of involuntary memory, Adorno believes that experience in the true sense—spiritual experience—is something that breaks into conceptual language almost from the outside. These experiences are "dizzying," and they "cannot be said" with the conventional means of conceptual language. Clearly, then, Adorno believes there is a considerable fracture between the rigid conformity of the concept in its everyday use and the rescue of a genuine critical experience in these kinds of ways that involve working against the concept. For Adorno, what Schnädelbach (and Habermas) want to describe as critical reflection would simply not *be* an experience in the right sense. What is lacking here is the confrontation with thought and world that is capable of disclosing the habitual use of concepts in a new light. In the final chapter, I will explore this idea more fully through an encounter with John McDowell's account of disenchantment in his *Mind and World*.

7

A Contemporary Outbreak Attempt

John McDowell on Mind and World

Introduction

In his book *Mind and World*, John McDowell presents the problematic of contemporary philosophy in a fashion that invites substantive parallels with Adorno's philosophical project. Like Adorno, McDowell is concerned with a process of disenchantment that breaks the entwinement of subject and object, or what McDowell refers to as "mind" and "world." Recent analytic philosophy, according to McDowell, consists of a series of failed attempts to rethink this relation by prioritizing one or the other side of the dichotomy. What is particularly worthy of note is that McDowell traces the philosophical problems surrounding the relation of mind and world to the growth to prominence of a certain natural-scientific way of understanding the world. Essentially, the natural-scientific conception emptied nature of the kind of meaningfulness that would allow the subject to find its place within it. Now, as McDowell sees it, we have been bequeathed a picture in which the sole possible location for the functions of subjectivity must be outside of nature, in an independent realm. Like Adorno, McDowell's (1994) own solution calls for a partial spiritualization of the world, a reenchantment of nature that would resituate subjective capacities as an outgrowth of the natural world. This idea of a disenchanted nature, and its consequences in terms of the desiccation of experiential meaning, is equivalent to that historical development that Adorno attributes to the dominance of the constituting subject. And it is precisely the stunted idea of experience as organized by the constituting subject that negative dialectic wants to oppose through its recovery of spiritual experience. It is unsurprising, then, that several

Adorno commentators have seen significant similarities in Adorno's philosophical endeavors and McDowell's attempt to reverse the alienation of mind from the world of nature in *Mind and World*. J. M. Bernstein (2002) has suggested that there is an "overarching correspondence" between the theories of Adorno and McDowell based on the common problematic of the disenchantment of nature, and the role of the natural-scientific worldview in bringing about and sustaining this disenchantment. Others have portrayed this connection in terms of a critique of the reification of subjectivity, and the thesis of thought's dependence on the object for its very meaningfulness.[1]

The link between McDowell and Adorno comes fully into view, I believe, if we see McDowell's goal in *Mind and World* as another attempted outbreak from the confines of the constituting subject, similar to those of Husserl and Bergson. This does not mean that the theoretical presuppositions of McDowell and of those late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century thinkers are compatible. There is very little in common, in terms of philosophical vocabulary, between McDowell's reading of the problems of late-twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy, and Husserlian phenomenology or Bergsonian *Lebensphilosophie*.[2] But what they do share is the governing intention to break out of the natural-scientific picture of experience and its concomitant restriction of what can count as a cognitive encounter with the world to the registering of natural-scientific facts. We saw this impulse at work in Husserl's efforts to demarcate a sphere of nonfactual meaning, accessible through the intuition of essences (*Wesensschau*) and independent of the framework of natural-scientific experience. For Bergson, it is the faculty of intuition, reaching down to life itself, that is supposed to enable a cognitive assimilation of the world beyond the work of causal-mechanical classification. McDowell also wants to assert that our cognitive relation with the world is not reducible to natural-scientific classification, what he refers to as the realm of law. The realm of law is in fact the realm of disenchanted nature, a world of causal connections ideally describable without any reference to subjective meaning and purposes. In McDowell's account, the realm of law is to be reinscribed as part of a larger nature that encompasses the troublesome concept of "second nature."[3] In this way, McDowell wants to make room for the possibility of a broader realm of meaning, including aesthetic and ethical values, as a part of the world of nature. So far as it goes, McDowell would seem to share the same philosophical intentions as Adorno in his epistemological writings. But if we take a closer look at how McDowell conceives the outbreak attempt, substantial differences immediately become apparent. In fact, as I will argue, these differences go to the heart of the question of what it means for thought to be (in McDowell's phrase) "answerable" to the world.

McDowell perceptively captures the sense of confinement that Adorno associates with the constituting subject in his reference to a "deeper anxiety" that pervades modern philosophy (1994, xiii). As McDowell sees it, this com-

prises an inchoately felt threat that our way of thinking leaves us "out of touch" with the rest of reality. This is not simply a question about whether our beliefs are justified; it is a worry that cuts deeper than epistemological skepticism. It concerns the issue of what it means for thinking to be responsive to the world at all. From an Adornian point of view, this has to count as an excellent description of the consequences of disenchantment. It captures the sense that Adorno refers to in the lectures on ontology and dialectic of being "locked up" in the fabricated structures of subjectivity (2002, 189). It is this very sentiment that motivated Husserl's call for a return *zu den Sachen*, as well as Bergson's notion of intuition.

For Adorno, the idea of thought's dependence, its answerability to the world, must be conceived in terms of the idea of *Selbstbesinnung* or self-awareness. McDowell's error, or so I will suggest, is that he repeats the Husserlian mistake of attempting to execute the outbreak within the terms of the epistemological problematic. The result is a recapitulation of the diminishing of experience within the confines of the constituting subject. Like Husserl, McDowell ends up grasping the *déchet* or refuse of experience, not the undiminished experience that would mark a genuine outbreak. In the broadest terms, Adorno believes that the deeper anxiety of which McDowell speaks is rooted in real social-historical conditions. It can be understood, but not overcome by philosophical interpretation.[4] The goal of *Selbstbesinnung* (self-awareness) is to disclose the dependence of philosophical concepts on social-historical experience, to show how social-historical experience has always already made its way into concepts. It is therefore a disclosure of language's dependence on a world that constrains what it is able to say.

McDowell's attempted reconciliation of mind and world will replicate the impoverishment of experience wrought by the classificatory concept. The enchanted nature that McDowell wants to recover, or so I will argue, is little more than the *caput mortuum* of genuine spiritual experience. If this could be demonstrated, as I shall try to do in what follows, it would offer further support for Adorno's contention that the only way to get beyond the classificatory concept is to work against it from within. The structuring of concepts and social experience through the process of diremption that creates the constituting subject will necessarily subvert any attempt to leap outside classificatory thinking and the concomitant disenchanted conception of nature. Because all philosophic concepts embody the withering of experience within their structure, an outbreak on these terms is doomed to fail. The only solution, for Adorno, is therefore to drive the alienated concept to self-awareness, generating a recognition of the logic of diremption that makes it work as the extinguishing of the experiencing subject.

McDowell's theory therefore must be understood as another failed outbreak, and as furnishing further evidence for the impossibility of leaping outside

of the classificatory concept. What makes McDowell's work especially significant, however, is that it provides a particularly lucid contemporary reading of the philosophic consequences of disenchantment. The failure of this outbreak attempt does not detract from the acuity of insight that enables McDowell to pose the problem of alienation in perspicuous form. What Adorno says about Bergson and Husserl, namely that their thinking was motivated by a "resistance to the total dominance of causal-mechanical thinking" and by a desire to recover the "intention of comprehension [*Begreifen*]" (2003a, 106), could equally well be said of McDowell. McDowell's work therefore provides a promising occasion for testing the theoretical astuteness of Adorno's analysis, and also for exploring the contemporary relevance of Adorno's search for the recovery of experience. By showing where McDowell goes wrong, it will be possible to vindicate Adorno's strategy of attempting to execute the outbreak as *Selbstbesinnung*. I want first to focus on McDowell's commitment to the epistemological problematic and the problems this creates. I then want to look closely at McDowell's idea of "second nature," which is key to his attempted overcoming of the consequences of disenchantment.

DISENCHANTMENT AND NATURAL-SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING

Husserl's phenomenology, I suggested, situates itself in opposition to a certain kind of naturalism, represented by the theories of empiricism and positivism. Naturalism reduces experience to the identification of quantifiable data, and thereby excludes those ways of encountering the world that do not rest upon the registering of isolable, singular facts. Husserl argues that the reductivist impulse of naturalism occludes access to those dimensions of experience that are not compatible with a natural-scientific way of looking at the world. Things, Husserl argues, are not reducible to "things of nature" (1922, 35). That is to say, there is more to the cognitive encounter with the world than can be revealed from the naturalist perspective. McDowell's reading of modern philosophy in *Mind and World* takes up the same point concerning a certain blindness to experience engendered by the natural-scientific understanding of the world. McDowell wants to challenge the presupposition that something's being natural is its position in the realm of law, in order to open up a space for a cognitive encounter with nature that would not be assimilable to the narrow natural-scientific model of a knowledge of causal connections (1994, 74). Although McDowell, like Husserl, evinces enormous respect for the advances in understanding brought about by the modern natural sciences, there is a similar suspicion in his account that the possibilities of a cognitive relation with nature have been somehow curtailed

as a result of the prominence of the natural-scientific perspective. In a move similar to Husserl's in the first volume of his *Ideen*, McDowell argues that we should "refuse to equate [the realm of law] with nature, let alone with what is real" (p. 109).

It is worth noting that McDowell's intention to bring into critical view the disenchantment of nature brought about by the natural-scientific perspective finds resonances with other thinkers in the Anglo-American tradition. In remarkably similar terms to the thesis of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Hilary Putnam captures the process of the emasculation of experience in the reduction of nature to what is compatible with the naturalist framework.

> On the one hand, the idea that science (in the sense of exact science) exhausts rationality is seen to be a self-stultifying error. . . . On the other hand, any conception of rationality broad enough to embrace philosophy—not to mention linguistics, mentalistic psychology, history, clinical psychology, and so on—must embrace much that is ill-defined, no more capable of being "scientized" than was the knowledge of our forefathers. The horror of what cannot be "methodized" is nothing but method fetishism. (1990, 140)

The "horror" of what is not methodizable recalls the fear of the unknown that plays such a central role in Adorno's (1972a) pseudo-psychoanalytic depiction of positivist Enlightenment.[5] The compulsion to scientize the world is revealed, on both accounts, as a process in which all possibilities for revealing nature other than in instrumental terms are stripped of their cognitive import. Putnam wants to point out, against this tendency, that values are themselves the preconditions of having something like a world at all. Instrumentalism is itself therefore a type of value system, although, he claims, a "sick one" (1990, 141).

The need to break the grip of positivist thinking, to which Putnam refers, is clearly identifiable as a governing motif of McDowell's philosophical concerns. It is also in this regard that his affinity with previous outbreak theorists becomes readily apparent. In his paper "Two Sorts of Naturalism," McDowell articulates the familiar point about the deleterious consequences of disenchantment within the naturalist framework.

> According to the sort of outlook I mean, reality is exhausted by the natural world, in the sense of the world as the natural sciences are capable of revealing it to us. Part of the truth in the idea that science disenchants nature is that science is committed to a dispassionate and dehumanized stance for investigation; that is taken to be a matter of conforming to a metaphysical insight into the character of

> reality as such. . . . Any candidate feature of reality that science cannot capture is downgraded as a projection, a result of mind's interaction with the rest of nature. (1998a, 175)

Like Husserl, McDowell wants to give the impersonal stance of scientific understanding its due, both as a valuable source of truth about the world and, historically, as a practice that unmasked the subjective illusions of prescientific thinking. But at the same time, McDowell wants to apply Husserl's demarcation strategy to the realm of scientific thinking. In this vein, he argues that it is one thing to say that the impersonal stance of science has been methodologically essential for the achievement of a "valuable mode of understanding reality." It is another thing to take this mode of understanding "for a metaphysical insight into the notion of objectivity," so that any kind of objectivity "must be anchored in this kind of access to the real" (1998a, 182). This opens up the possibility that there may be a form of access to the real that is independent of natural scientific categories.

In *Mind and World*, McDowell extends this dissatisfaction with naturalist thinking into an ambitious project that seeks to remove the sting of naturalism by questioning its key assumptions about our cognitive relation to the world. McDowell's goal is to recover the epistemological role of experience, or in other words to show how rational thinking (the "logical space of reasons") can be *rationally* responsive to the world. Naturalism, on McDowell's reading, is unable to make sense of this idea. He establishes this point by uncovering what is taken to be a pervasive (and unescapable under naturalist assumptions) oscillation in Anglo-American philosophy between two unsatisfying alternatives. In order to be answerable to the world, the conceptual sphere must be revisable in the light of experience. Thus the first move is to look for an external constraint on thinking that will check the operation of concepts. What happens within the space of reasons ultimately has its foundation in what impinges on it from the outside. This is where the temptation to appeal to the "Given" beyond the conceptual sphere arises, according to McDowell. The idea of the Given, however, cannot achieve what it is supposed to since, as McDowell puts this, it provides "exculpations" rather than "justifications" (1994, 8). That is to say, the Given can furnish only a *causal* impingement on the freedom of the conceptual sphere, not a *rational* constraint, since (by definition) it is outside the type of relations (warrant, justification, etc.) that govern the elements of the space of reasons. From this failure, coherentism, the other pole of this oscillation, asserts that we give up entirely the idea of an external grounding for thinking.[6] On McDowell's reading, coherentism accepts that experience, as conceived on the naturalist picture, cannot give us reasons to believe things about the world, since reasons only hold among conceptually structured items. Due to the fact that the external grounding for

thinking ("the world") is conceived in natural-scientific terms as the framework of causal impingements, there is no way of making sense of a cognitive role for experience on these terms.

The key to McDowell's epistemological solution to disenchantment is the idea of a passive operation of conceptual capacities in the process of experience. Experiential intake, McDowell suggests, is to be understood as an occurrence or state that "already has conceptual content" (1994, 9). Because this passive exercise of conceptual capacities cannot be separated from their role within the space of rational judgment, the donations of sensibility can be integrated, as rational checks or constraints, into the rational relations of spontaneity. McDowell describes the nature of experience on this model as follows:

> In "outer experience," a subject is passively saddled with conceptual contents, drawing into operation capacities seamlessly integrated into a conceptual repertoire that she employs in the continuing activity of adjusting her world-view, so as to enable it to pass a scrutiny of its rational credentials. It is this integration that makes it possible for us to conceive experience as awareness, or at least seeming awareness, of a reality independent of experience. (p. 31)

McDowell is arguing that the impacts of the world on sensibility are not describable solely and simply in natural-scientific terms as causal events. They are rather cases of the subject's perceiving "that things are thus and so" (p. 26). This is, at the same time, a conceptual content *and* the layout of the world. As McDowell puts this in the Woodbridge lectures, visual experiences "make" or "contain" claims. They are conceptual episodes that make use of conceptual capacities in reception (1998b, 438). On the basis of this argument, McDowell is able to conclude that the notion of conceptually structured operations of receptivity allow for an understanding of experience as an "openness to the layout of reality." Perception, McDowell wants to say, is simply the taking in of the fact that things are thus and so, that this is how it is in the world. McDowell is able in this way to build conceptual content into the fabric of the world, although, it seems (as I shall argue more fully shortly), at a potentially high cost. For what is implied in this reading is a revelation of the world of experience as a world of isolable facts. The risk McDowell runs with this strategy is that of losing the whole idea of a genuine productive interplay and mutual correction in experience; the world itself now seems pre-prepared for easy digestion and assimilation by existing conceptual categories. Nature may be a sort of constraint on conceptual thinking in this model, but it is a constraint so domesticated as to be practically powerless to challenge the operation of the concept. What is missing from this picture is a role for experience,

the encounter with the world, in engendering the self-reflection of cognitive categories. Without self-reflection, experience will be incapable of giving rise to the self-transformation of cognitive forms. It is the process of this transformation through experience, of course, that is the core of the Hegelian dialectic as a "way of despair." To put this another way, the model of the world of experience as a series of concurrent bits of fact, of "this is the case," sounds suspiciously similar to the model of mathematical cognition that Hegel deals with harshly in the introduction to the *Phenomenology*.

> In such an unreal element, there is only what is true in non-actuality, that is, fixed, dead assertions; one can stop at each one of these; the following one starts afresh, without the first one moving itself forward to the second and, in this way, without there arising a necessary context through the nature of the thing itself. (1948, 37)

For Hegel, as for Adorno, the picture of the world as a series of isolated facts is itself a legacy of a certain kind of naturalist thinking that dialectic has to penetrate to get at the living context that unifies things in relationships that are not (or not wholly) classificatory. Philosophical knowledge, on Adorno's view, is the ability to "open up" things that "traditional thought has considered opaque, impenetrable, and mere products of individuation" (1993b, 80–81). What Adorno means here is the illumination of things from out of their social-historical context, where this implies the dissolution (or self-correction) of the appearance of particulars as mere exemplars of concepts. The awareness of this non-classificatory context becomes impossible on McDowell's account since experience is defined as the encounter with items that are pre-prepared so as to function as repeatable exemplars.

McDowell recognizes that the picture of experience as already conceptual generates a conflict with the understanding of experience in terms of the categories of natural science. In declaring nature to be thoroughly rationally assimilable by thinking, McDowell will have to grapple with the entire problematic of the disenchantment of nature that depicts nature as a self-enclosed causal system. The disenchanted conception, McDowell asserts, is sustained by a "deep-rooted mental block" (1994, 69). McDowell traces this to the rise of the natural sciences and the emergence of an understanding of nature that seems to empty it of meaning. The problem of disenchantment, as McDowell sees it, is that the logical space that defines intelligibility and rational thinking has become split off from the causal space that defines nature as the realm of law. The suggestion that conceptual content permeates the natural world appears on this picture as a "crazily nostalgic attempt to re-enchant the natural world" (p. 72). The type of reenchantment McDowell has in mind, however, does not denote anything like a return to

mythic powers in nature. Nor, more significantly from an Adornian perspective, does it perceive the operation of classificatory concepts to be complicit in the loss of a more encompassing reconciliation of mind and word. In fact, what McDowell wants to urge as the key to overcoming the natural-scientific distortion is the idea of the conceptual as "unbounded on the outside" (p. 83). The consequences of disenchantment are to be revoked by the positing of nature as always already penetrated by conceptuality. Of course, this will only satisfy if disenchantment is exclusively a philosophical problem, rather than the result of a process that insinuates itself into the very structure of our linguistic practices. It is only on this assumption that the worry about whether we are out of touch, the deep-rooted but "non-compulsory influence on our thinking" (p. 85), can be quelled without having to raise the question of whether disenchantment encompasses an intrinsic disfigurement of thinking, in Hegel's (1948) terms, the reduction of *Begreifen* to mere predication.[7] The problem for McDowell's account is that, if the world is already pressed into the form of classifiable facts, there is nowhere for that type of experience to occur that is supposed to lead to the self-transformation of concepts. The question I am raising here is whether McDowell's outbreak attempt, like that of phenomenology, ends up as an outbreak into a mirror (Adorno 1966, 91), simply recapitulating the diminished experience definitive of the constituting subject.

McDowell's Epistemological Antinomy

The idea of a passive operation of conceptual capacities in receptivity is conceived by McDowell as a solution to what he takes to be a fundamental antinomy in our modern understanding of what is involved in knowing. Experience, he argues, both must, and yet cannot (because of our prevailing understandings) stand in judgment of our beliefs about what the world is like. The first thesis maintains that experience must constitute a sort of tribunal on our knowledge in order to make it intelligible that what we are dealing with is a worldview at all. The second thesis articulates the conception of nature linked to the rise of the modern natural sciences, in the frame of which experience can appear only as a causal impact on the senses, and hence cannot constitute a tribunal in the right sense. In order to be a tribunal, experience would both have to constrain movements within the space of reasons from the outside (it would have to be preconceptual), and it would have to comprise a rational, not merely a causal constraint (it would have to have *cognitive* weight). The conjunction of these two factors, of course, characterizes precisely the Sellarsian myth of the Given. McDowell, at least in terms of his formulation of the problem, appears to want to stay within the frame of Kantian

transcendental inquiry. The question, he suggests, is "how is it possible that there are world views at all?" (1999, 195).[8] I want to suggest that the way McDowell poses this problem registers once again the forgetting of philosophy's dependence, and it is the same forgetting that undermines any attempt to execute the outbreak from the constituting subject other than as the movement of self-awareness. I want to address this issue, first, by exploring a difference between McDowell and Adorno on the issue of what a transcendental critique should do. I will then suggest that, at the root of these issues, there lies the constricted nature of McDowell's view of language. In particular, I will suggest that his purported solution entrenches the exclusion of the expressive role of language.

A transcendental inquiry, for Kant, means a search for the ultimate conditions in terms of which there is knowledge. These conditions, furthermore, are thought to be a priori. For McDowell, a response to the question of how worldviews are possible—that is, systems of beliefs that are answerable to the world—can be formulated in terms of this condition of possibility: conceptual capacities must be operative in receptivity, and therefore able to place cognitive constraints on movements within the space of reasons. My intention here is not to criticize this solution directly.[9] What I want to suggest, rather, is that McDowell's understanding of what philosophy is called on to do in this circumstance reflects in quite an extreme fashion the forgetting of dependence. At one point in *Mind and World*, McDowell suggests that the antinomy loses its grip "*if we reject the framework* that is the real source of the problems of traditional empiricism, *namely, the dualism of reason and nature*" (1994, 155; my emphasis). McDowell appears to want to ask, How could we rearrange our concepts so that reason and nature are no longer in contradiction with one another? Asking the transcendental question in *this* way, I am arguing, is what makes it impossible for us to take the Adornian route out of the epistemological problematic through the dialectic of self-awareness. These issues are not tangential, but in fact (I will argue shortly) go to the heart of McDowell's attempt to Hegelianize the Kantian scheme while ditching the idealist baggage.[10] But first, I want to illustrate what I mean by McDowell's failure to take the antinomy sufficiently seriously by comparing it with a typical Adornian treatment.

From an Adornian point of view, McDowell's treatment of the epistemological antinomy is a classic example of that sort of fetishism that grounds the loss of the expressive function of concepts. The conditions of the meaningfulness of philosophical concepts are here cut loose entirely from their relation to historical practice. This is what makes the antinomy appear as a *purely* philosophical problem, and not at all as an expression of historical experience. Compare, for instance, Adorno's account of the "phenomenological antinomies" in a 1937 manuscript on Husserl's philosophy.

> [Phenomenology] unfolds its concepts to the point at which its contradictions become manifest; its contradictions are not individual errors of thought; rather they necessarily produce themselves out of the movement of the concept itself; and the Husserlian logic finally stands as an expression of the contradictory character of that world, from which as logic it would like to distance itself. (Adorno 1986, 82)

Adorno's treatment of antinomy is here governed by the intention of rescuing its expressive moment. What matters is that the articulation of the antinomy should be put in the service of disclosing the historical experience that, finally, is the world that makes our concepts able to mean anything at all. But this means, of course, that an antinomy cannot be simply dismissed as a philosophical error. To attempt to do so is a failure to recognize what the dependence of philosophy on experience means, as though philosophy could simply shrug off the weight of disenchantment and define its concepts anew. Adorno's claim is that any attempt to take this route out of disenchantment will simply recapitulate the constriction of cognitive experience in a new form.[11] The route of *Selbstbesinnung*, in contrast, is one that brings disenchantment to expression through concepts.[12]

Another way of approaching this issue is in terms of the viability of McDowell's attempt to extract a purely epistemological thesis from post-Kantian idealism. In the Woodbridge lectures, McDowell presents the idea of the actualization of conceptual capacities in reception as a Hegelian reading of Kant.[13] McDowell intends this to be an answer to what he takes to be Sellars's point that an external constraint that would be more than "sheer" (nonconceptual) receptivity would kindle the threat of idealism, namely, "the threat that the supposed objects of these conceptual shapings of consciousness can only be projections of our conceptual activity" (1998b, 489). The problem with Sellars's perspective, McDowell argues, is that he fails to see how the "Hegelian conceit" of incorporating receptivity within Reason can be understood in terms of a more "soberly describable" possibility (p. 490). But it is not at all clear that the "Hegelian conceit" *can* be separated, as a self-standing epistemological thesis in the way McDowell's argument requires. It is in fact only at the end of the *Phenomenology*, after the epistemological inquiry of the beginning sections has been cashed out in terms of reason's dependence on history, the process that makes us the kind of knowers we are, that we are entitled to the claim that receptivity (Hegel talks of it in terms of immediacy) is not external to the movement of thinking. Hegel clearly does not understand the idea to be a self-standing thesis, a contribution to the epistemological problematic; it is rather epistemology's overcoming in the historical comprehension of the reflective practices that Hegel calls "spirit." I am not simply claiming here that McDowell has not understood Hegel correctly. I am suggesting that this misunderstanding is

symptomatic of a broader failure to make sense of the dependence of philosophy on experience. McDowell, perhaps, is aware that following through on the historical contextualizing of epistemology as carried out by Hegel in the *Phenomenology* may indeed conjure up the "bad" (i.e., not soberly describable) idealism that Sellars fears.[14] But, I would suggest, the moment of truth in Hegel's account is the insight that the epistemological problematic is not soluble in its own terms, that is, without some such work of historical contextualization. The strength of Adorno's standpoint is that it is able to bring the epistemological antinomy, imminently, to a recognition of its own dependence on historical experience.[15]

For Adorno, if the dependence of philosophical concepts on experience means anything, it means the awareness of the inadequacy of those concepts, the moment in which their failure to put experience into words becomes accessible *as* experience. This, for Adorno, is what it means for thought to have an external constraint. Concepts, through the awareness of their dependence, disclose experience as what makes language incapable of saying what it wants to say. The recognition of this failure is the moment when thought comes up against the constraint of what is outside thinking. For Adorno, this is what makes possible the critical self-reflective role of philosophy, where it calls us to a critique of our concepts and the historical experience of which they are a part. To call this moment of the disclosure of dependence "pain raised into the concept," is to acknowledge its potential to reveal experience in a critical light, as in need of transformation. Now McDowell evidently wants to endorse something similar to this picture of thinking as a "self-critical activity" (1994, 34). I am arguing that precisely this idea is what becomes impossible on McDowell's account. And this is directly due to the fact that McDowell conceives the dependence of concepts on experience from within the extremely narrow terms of the epistemological problematic.

McDowell's outbreak attempt, then, follows the failed pattern of previous attempts in leaving no place for spiritual experience. As we have seen, spiritual experience requires a dismantling of the distinction between cognitive form and empirical content that, Adorno believes, is definitive of the constituting subject. Experience must be made accessible, he believes, not merely as a generalizable content that is subsumable under formal rules. It is the historical experience that has become expressed in the forming moment of cognition that must itself be made accessible *as* experience. Adorno's comment in his lectures on Hegel, that Hegel attacks "mere epistemology" by showing that the forms considered to constitute knowledge "depend as much on the content of knowledge as vice versa" (1993b, 65) may at first glance sound like McDowell's call for empirical content to provide "friction" to the rational working of concepts. But in fact Adorno is pointing to a more radical idea of dependence, in which epistemological concepts are themselves conceived as

formed by historical experience, and hence as embodying that experience in the form of expression, not merely as content.[16] The point I want to make here is that this idea is indispensable to the model of philosophy as a self-critical activity that McDowell wants to endorse. Since his account is unable to get back behind the constituting subject, McDowell's account collapses in to the "bad" idealism that he wants to avoid. In this regard, McDowell's effort to distinguish his account of the external constraint of receptivity from "bad" idealism is telling.

> [T]here is nothing against this reading of the transcendental role of sensibility except the putative reasons yielded by scientism for denying genuine reality to the objects that, speaking within the manifest image, we say are immediately present to us in intuition. (1998b, 489)

It is here that the philosophical problems caused by McDowell's attempt to extract a narrow epistemological argument from Hegel become fully apparent. There is nothing in this picture resembling an adequate account of the historical nature of the encounter between concept and object (or form and content). In the Hegelian account, it is not the threat of scientism that raises an issue for the "genuine reality" of what is immediately present to intuition. It is the historical nature of the forms within which particulars appear as particulars of a certain sort.[17] The "nonsheer receptivity" that McDowell endorses simply does not provide a sufficiently robust form of self-reflection to ground philosophy as a self-critical activity. Adorno's account, I have argued, does possess such a feature in its capacity to disclose the historical experience that is expressed in the cognitive forms themselves (which Adorno takes to be the structure of the constituting subject). The external constraint is here conceived as the movement *within* concepts that discloses the moment of historical content within conceptual form.

On Adorno's view, these issues must inevitably lead philosophy toward a concern with language and expression. In particular, Adorno would want to claim that what gets lost between the space of nature and the space of reasons on McDowell's account is the expressive moment of language. Recovering an adequate understanding of philosophy as a self-critical practice requires a broader perspective on the potential for self-reflection within language. McDowell lauds the "special nature" of the type of understanding that belongs to the space to reasons, which places things in rational relations to one another (1999, 101). From an Adornian perspective, there is no quibble with this description per se. The problem, rather, is that the *exclusive* identification of the cognitive potential of language with the rule-governed moves of discursive reason makes cognition blind to the expressive nature of language. And *this*, on the Adornian account, is what makes the dualism seem unbridgeable.

Michael Rosen (2001) has perceptively argued that the focus on rhetoric, and the creative aspects of language, in philosophers like Adorno and also Gadamer is due to an awareness of the way in which language transcends the formal structure of rules. To see language as a system of rules, Rosen argues, "is to miss that essential, transformative element by which new meanings are developed, not arbitrarily or mechanically but creatively" (p. 374). Adorno's notion of *Selbstbesinnung* depends on this distinction between language that explores the deeper experiential resonances of concepts, and language as a form of rule-governed classification.[18] The openness to the "way things manifestly are" that McDowell wants to make intelligible is, for Adorno, really only possible as the role of language in opening up concepts to the historical experience expressed within them. It is this moment, the cognitive force of world disclosure within language, which is occluded by the construction of experience within the epistemological problematic.

I am arguing that taking seriously the potential of philosophical thinking as a self-critical activity requires that we think in Adorno's terms about how experience is disclosed in language. The Proustian idea of renaming through metaphoric chains captures perfectly one way of thinking about this disclosive potential of language.[19] Adorno's idea of the experience that comes to expression in what concepts are unable to say (the understanding of which has been a central goal of this work) is another way of thinking about language's cognitive potential beyond its role in subsuming particulars under general concepts. McDowell wants to say that thought's answerability to the world can be taken care of if we think of the constraint provided by conceptually ordered empirical content. The perception that "here is a black swan," for example, would on McDowell's view be a case where the world exerts a rational influence on our thinking. But it is the sharp separation of form and content here that makes this an impoverished view of experience. What this allows for is simply piecemeal readjustments in the rules governing rational relations. It is certainly nothing like that transformation of concepts into their experiential substance that Adorno wants to bring about.

SECOND NATURE

McDowell's philosophical path toward the notion of second nature can be traced to a profound disquiet with the treatment of aesthetic and ethical values in naturalist thinking. In an earlier paper on ethics, McDowell (1998c) had attempted to undermine the "projectivist" view of ethical insights as subjective projections onto a world of facts (itself an outgrowth of the classic positivist treatment of ethical assertions as the expression of subjective attitudes). McDowell's response to this was to try to block the move from

the claim that ethical insights embody subjective engagement with the world, to the conclusion that they must therefore be *merely* projective. Ethical attitudes, McDowell claims, are the "upshot of sensibilities," that is, they are "propensities to form various attitudes in response to various features of situations" (p. 154). What McDowell is hinting at here could be put as follows: from the fact that subjectivity has a role in disclosing certain sorts of insights about the world, we cannot without further ado dismiss those insights as falling short of a fully rigorous standard of objectivity. What is in question, in other words, is the very definition of cognitive truth as ideally subject-independent. For Adorno, of course, this divestment of subjectivity from the world is the key development in the transition to a model of cognition in terms of the constituting subject. It is only as a result of this process that the subject, whose cognitive relationship with nature is now seen to be exhausted by the performance of rule-governed syntheses, finds itself severed from all noninstrumental relations with nature. And it is the confinement within this structure that motivates the need for the outbreak. In the paper "Values and Secondary Qualities," McDowell makes the point about the capacity of subjective responses to reveal the world in terms of a comparison with color concepts (1998d, 146). Although, he argues, values are not "independently there" any more than colors (i.e., secondary qualities) are, "this does not prevent us from supposing that they are there independently of any particular apparent experience of them." The idea that only what is ideally free of subjective engagement in this strong sense counts as "real," is an interpretation that McDowell wants to reveal as a prejudice. It is part of the way that certain features of the world reveal themselves, McDowell wants to claim, that they give rise to subjective dispositions and reactions.[20] But to say that they are thus dependent on the subject for their disclosure does not permit us to conclude that they are illusory, or "subjective" in the negative sense of nonveridical. The type of world disclosure that takes place in ethical (or aesthetic) responses to the world is for McDowell not constructible out of the sort of facts of which the world is made up on the natural-scientific account. This means that we are obliged not to let disenchanted nature stand in judgment on the objective veracity of ethical and aesthetic encounters with the world. The idea of nature is therefore extended beyond its naturalistic confines.

In *Mind and World*, McDowell fills out the idea of a partial reenchantment of nature by elucidating the concept of second nature. Again, it is in terms of the type of cognitive encounter with the world typified in ethics that McDowell expounds this idea. The point McDowell wants to make is that a certain process of cultural formation, or *Bildung*, sensitizes us to the conceptual layout of the world, or it "opens our eyes" to the sort of intelligibility that cannot be perceived from within the natural-scientific perspective on nature

(1994, 79). We are alerted to the presence of the rational requirements of ethical thinking by the process of enculturation in which we acquire the relevant ethical capacities. The import of this idea is expressed as follows:

> Moulding ethical character, which includes imposing a specific shape on the practical intellect, is a particular case of a general phenomenon: initiation into conceptual capacities, which include responsiveness to other rational demands besides those of ethics. Such initiation is a normal part of what it is for a human being to come to maturity. (p. 84)

According to McDowell's reading of second nature, rational faculties are revealed as actualizations of natural capacities, a "potentiality that is part of our nature" (p. 89). This is supposed to assuage the worry that participation in the space of reasons tears us out of the context of nature. Second nature is therefore what allows us to make sense of rational requirements that are intrinsic to the world of experience. The space of reasons is not here a *super*-naturalism, it is conceived as our initiation into an awareness of the rational structure of the world. It is as *natural* beings, in other words, that we come to live within the space of reasons. Second nature, as McDowell puts it, "could not float free of potentialities that belong to a normal human organism" (p. 84). This is why, for McDowell, we are able to calm the anxiety that we are out touch: the rational forms through which we come to know nature are themselves revealed as founded in a *natural* potential of the human. Meaning, McDowell asserts, "is not a mysterious gift from outside nature" (p. 88). It is the actualization of this natural potential that is supposed to engender openness to the world, its revelation in terms of the categories of the space of reasons.

McDowell is able to extend theoretically the domain of the natural with his naturalism of second nature, but it appears to be a nature that is strangely devoid of history. McDowell concedes that an implication of the idea of *Bildung* is that "the category of the social is important" (1994, 95). However, if it is indeed the social that is doing the work of mediating nature and reason, it looks like we will have to thoroughly historicize the encounter with the world that is opened up in second nature. It is precisely here that the consequences of Hegel's historicizing of the transcendental subject become most apparent. For if the schemes that we use to understand nature are constituted and transmitted by a particular social order, through *Bildung*, we will need to find some way of making those schemes available for critical reflection if we are really to quell the anxiety that our thinking puts us "out of touch." Once the structures of world-disclosure are detranscendentalized, the assurance that our thinking actualizes natural capacities cannot suffice to quell metaphysical anxiety, since

nature is always already shot through with social history. To put this another way, the naturalism of second nature risks reifying a particular social-historical schema as a disclosure of the world in itself because it has no means of getting access to the social-historical background presuppositions of its own cognitive assumptions. The problem emerges with particular clarity in passages such as the following:

> The ethical is a domain of rational requirements, which are there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them. We are alerted to these demands by acquiring appropriate conceptual capacities. When a decent upbringing initiates us into the relevant way of thinking, our eyes are opened to the very existence of this tract of the space of reasons. Thereafter our appreciation of its detailed layout is indefinitely subject to refinement, in reflective scrutiny of our ethical thinking. (p. 82)

This attests to an especially optimistic view of the world-disclosive role of second nature. It is not clear what grounds this conception of second nature as always a positive and revelatory structure, and never as a concealment, or even as destructive of ethical insights. To take the example of ethical insights, it is no more intuitively plausible to suggest that second nature has functioned historically to further the formation of ethical knowledge as it is to claim the opposite. To see one obvious (and admittedly extreme) example of this, we can cite Hannah Arendt's trenchant analysis of the fate of ethical cognition under totalitarianism, in her report on the Eichmann trial.

> What we have demanded in these trials, where the defendants had committed "legal" crimes, is that human beings be capable of telling right from wrong even when all they have to guide them is their own judgment, which, moreover, happens to be completely at odds with what they must regard as the unanimous opinion of all those around them. . . . Since the whole of respectable society had in one way or another succumbed to Hitler, the moral maxims which determine social behavior and the religious commandments—"Thou shalt not kill!"—which guide conscience had virtually vanished. (1963, 294–95)

It is this problem, the potential of enculturation to disfigure, even to extinguish the possibility of ethical insight, that McDowell wants to gloss with the reference to a "decent upbringing." But here the assurance that we need not worry about whether we are out of touch with ethical truth about the world appears complacent. Faced with the profound anxiety of the individual who

worries that second nature works for us[21] as much in the way depicted by Arendt as in the fashion described by Aristotle, McDowell's confidence that we can comfortably exorcize these questions seems to collapse into quietism.

I do not mean to suggest here that McDowell simply neglects the self-critical function intrinsic to a form of world disclosure. This would be a serious misreading, as trying to establish the way reason can be constrained by the world without succumbing to the myth of an external validation is perhaps *the* central goal of *Mind and World*. But McDowell confuses the absence of an external validation (an appeal to the Given) with the unavailability of an insight that would illuminate the social-historical ground of second nature as a whole. An insight of this kind is precisely what Adorno is hinting at in the idea of *Selbstbesinnung*, the bringing of our central cognitive concepts to self-consciousness. But the type of critical encounter with the world that is permissible on McDowell's reading leaves the metaphysical worry unsatisfied. In the passage cited above, McDowell speaks of the detailed layout of the space of reasons as being "subject to refinement" in the "reflective scrutiny of our ethical thinking." But what motivates the metaphysical worry is the sense that our (ethical, and other) concepts systematically distance us from the world in important respects, that they disfigure the world as much as they reveal it; it is not a concern about whether they are sufficiently refined. McDowell is at pains to point out that, because "a thought passes muster so far," within the internal procedures of a way of thinking, "does not guarantee that it is acceptable" (1994, 81). This way of thinking and its standards for self-scrutiny "may have hitherto unnoticed defects, such as parochialism or reliance on bad prejudice." Here, metaphysical *Angst* seems to rear its head again, but McDowell is once again content to let the idea of "refinement" assuage the worry.

> [W]e can only make honest efforts to eliminate the sorts of defects we know our thinking risks, and perhaps to expand our conception of the way things might go wrong, so as to be on guard against other potential sources of error. The best we can achieve is always to some extent provisional and inconclusive, but that is no reason to succumb to the fantasy of external validation. (p. 81–82)

What gets lost between these possibilities of piecemeal refinement and external validation, I am suggesting, is a greater world-disclosive role for language as expression. It is when it is made to work as expression that language is able to make the structure constitutive of our conceptual relations with the world accessible as an item for critical reflection.[22] It is the impoverished idea of experience in McDowell's theory that is responsible for this absence, and I want to look at this more fully in the next section.

Domesticated Experience

I have been arguing that McDowell's notion of second nature, the key to his reconciliation of mind and world, cannot encompass a certain kind of critical self-awareness of thinking. I have described this in Adorno's terms as the potential for self-consciousness of cognitive categories, the moment in which a perspective on those categories becomes accessible that sees them as if from the outside. Negative dialectic is the process that is supposed to engender such an experience. Now I want to argue that McDowell is unable to capture this idea because his account is not able to put into critical focus the impoverished idea of experience that is a legacy of the history of disenchantment. Like Husserl, McDowell ends up with the mere *déchet* of experience. McDowell wants to overcome the alienation of subject and world that is the consequence of this history, but does not question the domesticated notion of experience that is itself a product of alienation. Therefore his reconciliation can offer only the semblance of an outbreak from the constituting subject.

I want to approach this issue by returning to the notion of *habitude* in Bergson and Proust. It was the influence of this idea in life philosophy that formed the basis for Lukács's (1971) subsequent use of the idea of "second nature" as a form of "servitude," the domination of society and thinking by the categories of reification. *Habitude*, in Proust's words, a "second nature" that "prevents us from knowing" first nature, conceptualizes the force of congealed structures of thinking and acting in reducing the encounter with the world to one of standardized, regularized impressions and responses (1999a, 1325). Words become dreary classifying devices, unresponsive to the subjective resonances of an experience, and action becomes a sort of unthinking routine. *Habitude*, as Bergson had noted, represents the constriction of experience in the interests of the instrumental needs of practical action. Whatever appears without purpose in the context of the practically useful gets excluded from the frame of experience as constituted by the second nature of *habitude*. It was this picture of second nature as a dead weight that supresses valuable and revelatory experiences about the self and society that motivated the search for forms of experience that could cut through the stultifying operations of *habitude*. Ultimately, the search led Proust to the notion of *mémoire involontaire*. In Adorno's philosophical works, the Lukácsian reading of second nature, as the structuring of society and thinking through the commodity form, is given prominence. Adorno (1972c) describes this as a universal structure of abstraction that instrumentalizes all forms of qualitative particularity as exchangeable means to the ends of the profit mechanism. When it infiltrates the conceptual sphere, this mechanism of abstraction transforms concepts into pure classificatory devices, eliminating the textures of meaning that enable particulars to be illuminated out of their social-historical context. Adorno's idea of constellation is

supposed to represent the potential reconstruction of this context using alienated concepts. What is figured in Proustian *mémoire involontaire*, and in Adorno's negative dialectic of concepts, is the possibility of making the stultifying, disfiguring work of second nature accessible *as* an experience. The intention, as Adorno makes clear, is to reveal the mutilated world of second nature as if from a perspective that would be beyond it (1951, 333–34).

It is clear for Adorno that achieving this sort of perspective is not a matter of distancing oneself from experience. Rather, such perspectives are only achievable by remaining "completely in touch with the objects" of everyday experience. This is another way of saying that the standpoint of redemption is not something that is brought to bear on the disfigured world from the outside. It is engendered by coaxing the classificatory concept to penetrate beneath the hardened surface of second nature, releasing the truth about alienation stored in the interior of everyday concepts. In this way, concepts are able to function as vehicles of spiritual experience. But if experience is confined to the kind of encounter with the world that is made possible in the conventional frame of second nature, as it is, for Adorno, on any understanding that accepts the reduction of cognition to forms of synthesis under general rules, it is this type of critical experience that gets lost. Now it is exactly this constriction of experience, I want to claim, that is intimated in McDowell's reduction of the cognitive encounter with the world to the recognition and assimilation of pre-prepared facts.

I want to try to clarify the problem I am trying to get at in McDowell's notion of experience by comparing McDowell's reading to another thinker, John Dewey, for whom the critique of congealed structures of habit was also an important part of the task for philosophy.[23] Like Adorno, Dewey traces the flattened and restricted notion of experience prevailing in the present to a historical process of diremption, in which experience becomes equivalent to the contents of a subjective consciousness that is set in opposition to nature (1925, 13). These two, for Dewey, are the broken halves of a conception of experience in the fullest sense. The natural-scientific reduction of experience, occurring through the severing of the subject's responses and reactions from nature, is described by Dewey as a form of "intellectualism."

> By "intellectualism" as an indictment is meant the theory that all experiencing is a mode of knowing, and that all subject-matter, all nature, is, in principle, to be reduced and transformed till it is defined in terms identical with the characteristics presented by refined objects of science as such. The assumption of "intellectualism" goes contrary to the facts of what is primarily experienced. (p. 21)

It is clear that what Dewey is describing here is the familiar scheme of disenchantment. The reduction of all of nature to the structures of the "refined objects

of science" can be read, in Adornian terms, as the reduction of cognition to classification, the registering of things as exemplars of general properties. On this account, Dewey claims (here prefiguring Adorno), nature becomes an "indifferent, dead mechanism." This is inevitable, Dewey believes, once experience is seen as a process locked up in a subject, which is supposed to be somehow "outside" the realm of nature. It is this move that inaugurates diremption, and its endpoint is inevitably the emptying of meaning from the world. Dewey's strategy for criticizing diremption begins from the insight that "all modes of experiencing are ways in which some genuine traits of nature come to manifest realization" (p. 24). This is Dewey's continuity thesis: the claim that there is nowhere for us plausibly to draw a fixed line between nature and experience. This insight reverses the movement toward a view of nature as ideally independent of subjective experience. On Dewey's account, the manifold ways in which the world affects the subject must be reintegrated into the understanding of what constitutes nature, including "the characters which make things lovable and contemptible, beautiful and ugly, adorable and awful" (p. 21).

On one level, Dewey's intention can certainly be read as compatible with that of McDowell. This seems to be clear in Dewey's claim that ethical and aesthetic insights must also be seen to "reach down" into nature, to have as good a claim to belong to it as the mechanical structures of physical science (1925, 5). It is precisely this extension of the realm of nature, I suggested, that is a central intention of McDowell's philosophical project. However, it is clear that, for Dewey, the true recovery of experience will require overturning the conception of the world as a realm of classifiable facts. For Dewey, experience in the full sense will penetrate beneath the congealed form of things, the familiar conceptual cuts in the fabric of the world that render it readily assimilable by habitual ways of thinking. This, I would claim, is how we must read a passage like the following:

> What is really "in" experience extends much further than that which at any time is *known*. From the standpoint of knowledge, objects must be distinct; their traits must be explicit; the vague and unrevealed is a limitation. Hence whenever the habit of identifying reality with the object of knowledge as such prevails, the obscure and vague are explained away. . . . [T]he assumption that nature in itself is all of the same kind, all distinct, explicit and evident, having no hidden possibilities, no novelties or obscurities, is possible only on the basis of a philosophy which at some point draws an arbitrary line between nature and experience. (p. 20–21)

There are unmistakable echoes in this passage of Husserl's (1922) critique of natualism's dismissal of ideas and essences as "metaphysical ghosts," the

process that figures in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as the compulsive elimination from language of all forms of meaning that point beyond the factual, leaving behind cognition that is restricted to repetition, and thought reduced to mere tautology. The target, in each case, is the natural-scientific constriction of experience to the recognition of series of singular, subsumable facts. The "obscure and vague," the "hidden possibilities" of which Dewey speaks, become apparent in the infusion of subjectivity into experience, and it is the recapturing of this possibility that enables the illumination of the cracks and crevices of the present. What I want to emphasize here is that an experience of this kind requires exploding the congealed form of things as pre-prepared conceptual contents. Objects themselves are revealed as sites of social-historical possibility, embodying a potential for transformation that becomes apparent only through the penetration of subjectivity into their very being.

Ordinary experience, Dewey claims, is "often infected with apathy, lassitude and stereotype" (1934, 260). This is Dewey's insight into the consequences of disenchantment for social experience. The type of unification of subject and nature that makes the world appear pregnant with possibility has become largely inaccessible. It is for this reason that Dewey looks for the traces of what would be a genuine, fulfilled experience in art and religion. Mirroring Adorno's reading of art's autonomy as its fate within alienated society, Dewey wants to claim that the separation of art as a separate and unique experience from everyday practice is itself a reflection of the alienated form of experience in the modern world. The task, he argues, is to "restore continuity" between the "refined and intensified forms of experience that are works of art" and the "everyday events, doings and sufferings" that make up ordinary social experience (p. 3). What Dewey wants to emphasize about art is primarily its manifestation of a certain "saturation" of the object by the subject (p. 276). In an artwork, images, ideas, and dreams infuse themselves into an object, immersing it so completely that it becomes impossible to separate the product of art into subjective and objective components. The object is illuminated *as* the object it is by the different threads of sense that reveal it as more than the exemplar of a class. Dewey puts this point by saying that, in art, "knowledge is transformed" (p. 290). It merges with "non-intellectual elements" to form a qualitatively different type of experience. Dewey here opposes the rendering intelligible of things in science through their reduction to "conceptual form," with the presentation of their meanings as a matter of a "clarified, coherent, and intensified or 'impassioned' experience." The type of world disclosure that is made possible in *this* type of experience, I want to claim, is one that can have no place on the type of unity of mind and world that McDowell wants to defend. What Dewey has in mind here, I would claim, is not the sort of experience in which we become aware of errors or possibilities for improvement in our existing categories, the "here is a black swan" sort of expe-

riences. It is one in which the world becomes accessible in experience *as a whole*, as a world whose fulfillment calls for its transformation. Art, Dewey argues, accentuates the sense of belonging to a larger, all-inclusive whole that overcomes the fragmentation of everyday experience.

> [In aesthetic perception, w]e are, as it were, introduced into a world beyond this world which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live in our ordinary experiences. We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves. . . . [T]he work of art operates to deepen and to raise to great clarity that sense of an enveloping undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience. (p. 195)[24]

The idea here that genuine experience reveals a "deeper" reality expresses an awareness of the corrosive force of second nature in obscuring an insight into the character of the world as a whole. McDowell's reading of experience as the "taking in" of how things are, where how things are is equivalent to that they are "thus and so" lacks both the temporal (the present as the site of the flow of the past into the future) and the substantial (the saturation of the object with needs and desires) unity of what Dewey has in mind.

Hans Joas (1997) has argued that Dewey's analyses of both aesthetic and religious experience are conceived in opposition to the "dismemberment" of everyday experience. Dewey sees a potential transformation of the quality and character of experience in the infusion of needs and desires into experience in everyday situations. Dewey denies the absolute distinction between the actual and the possible, and perceives the actual as embodying possibilities, which human beings are capable of grasping through the saturation of the actual by the subject. Joas argues that Dewey wants to emphasize the type of experience in which the power of imagination "penetrates" and "transforms" the frame of life (p. 179). It is not merely a question, in other words, of whether we can "find" purportedly subjective values in nature as present facts, but rather the capacity of those values, and other subjective responses to illuminate nature in new and transformative ways. The reification of values cannot be overcome simply by rereading them as objective instead of subjective facts. On Joas's reading, the reification of values is overcome for Dewey when values appear in experiences "in which they are experienced with the highest intensity as actual" (p. 180). It is the encompassing character of the illumination of experience when it becomes accessible as a whole that therefore grounds the integration of the world and the ideal.

It is this transformative role of genuine experience, I suggest, that is missing from McDowell's account, and this is because McDowell is unable to put into critical focus the restricted notion of experience that is a result of the process of disenchantment. Mind and world are joined together in McDowell's

reading, but they are united as the enfeebled, disfigured forms that they have become under the historical sway of the constituting subject: the world as the realm of isolable facts, and the subject as a classifying mechanism. This is reflected in McDowell's notion of the critical, self-reflexive character of thinking. There is "no guarantee," McDowell argues, that the world is completely within the reach of a system of concepts at some particular historical moment. This, he claims, is what grounds the "obligation to reflect."

> [T]he faculty of spontaneity carries with it a standing obligation to reflect on the credentials of the putatively rational linkages that, at any time, one takes to govern the active business of adjusting one's world-view in response to experience. Ensuring that our empirical concepts and conceptions pass muster is ongoing and arduous work for the understanding. It requires patience and something like humility. (1994, 40)

From a perspective that wants to call into question the fragmentation of experience, and the impoverishment of the encounter between mind and world within the forms of a reified second nature, McDowell's description of the "ongoing and arduous work" of understanding will look suspiciously like a continuation and intensification of the dreary, humdrum nature of natural-scientific classification. Dewey's analyses of aesthetic and religious experience provide a plausible reading of the type of interaction between mind and world that would be required to generate a critical perspective on the workings of second nature. The interaction in question would have to be informed by far more than is involved in McDowell's obligation to reflect, which seems to encompass little more than the process of fitting stray facts into the appropriate conceptual slots. Adorno and Dewey, I would argue, are looking for the type of experience that is able to break through the congealed structures of habit, structures that have their basis in the diremption of subject and object that enfeebles the capacity of concepts to illuminate the world. From this perspective, the epistemological problem of the grounding of our knowledge, the problem that McDowell takes to be rooted in an anxiety that is to be exorcised, is really a symptom of the broader process of the impoverishment of experience through the historical workings of disenchantment. It is because of this dependence of epistemological categories on the structuring of experience in the terms of the constituting subject that Adorno tries to lead epistemology toward self-awareness. Although it cannot be said directly (since it is presupposed in every use of an epistemological concept), it is revealed in the "blind spots," the lacunae in epistemological theory that enable glimpses of its dependence (1970a, 54).[25]

Because McDowell is unable to get a critical purchase on the impoverishment of experience that grounds the epistemological problem, his pur-

ported reconciliation ends up simply replicating the alienation of subject and object. What Adorno says of Husserl in this regard could equally well be applied to McDowell.

> Thinking, as "observed" by thinking, dismembers itself into an existing objective [aspect] and an element that passively registers such objectivity: through the form of phenomenological description borrowed from the sciences, which seemingly adds nothing to thinking, it is changed precisely in its own self. Thinking is driven out of thought. That is . . . the austere state of affairs of reification. (1970a, 56)

It is impossible, I think, not to see a similar reduction—the driving out of thinking from thought—in McDowell's notion of experience as the integration of *what is the case* into conceptual forms. Adorno's notion of truth as a "force-field" is intended to signal that interaction of subject and object in experience through which the penetration of subjective insight releases things into their social-historical context, once again enabling their potential to create meaning through their mutual illumination rather than as representatives of general properties. This is a type of experience that dissolves the pre-prepared appearance form of a world of singular facts that is itself a consequence of reification. What is key to this dissolution for Adorno is the ability of thinking to "overshoot" its object, its essential element of exaggeration (1951, 164). It is precisely the creative element of language, by which it attempts to recapture something of its potential to work as expression.[26]

McDowell and Adorno: Final Considerations

McDowell, like Husserl, is unable to conceive a successful outbreak from natural-scientific thinking because his theory replicates the narrowing of experience that makes the naturalist reduction unavoidable. What is required is a type of thinking that is able to put into critical focus the structuring of experience as the recognition and assimilation of repeatable exemplars. This, I argued, is what Adorno's efforts to raise epistemology to self-awareness are directed toward. Husserl, Adorno claims, succumbs to the impoverishment of experience that governs epistemology in his capitulation to the "positivist ideal of the mere taking in [*Hinnehmen*] of irreducible facts" (1970a, 63). It is the same reduction of experience that corrupts McDowell's outbreak attempt, manifested in his notion of experience as "taking in how things are" (1994, 26). The notion of the passive operation of conceptual capacities does not so much reflect the idea of an "openness to the world" as it does the failure of the subject to penetrate through the congealed structures of *habitude*. What is

called for, on Adorno's view, is a genuine interaction of subject and object, in which the subject's spontaneity is used to create new chains of significance that break through the congealed appearance form of things, as ossified objects from which the life of their passage through social history has been thoroughly drained. Adorno—and this is where he departs from Dewey—believed that the only way to achieve this was through a negative dialectic that would use the force of reified concepts against them, employing them in such a way as to create linked networks of sense that illuminate an object or idea without transforming it into a conceptual content.

Given Adorno's thesis that the central categories of epistemology are dependent on the encompassing structure of disenchantment, which separates absolutely form and content, any attempt to treat Adorno's negative dialectic as postulating straightforward epistemological theses will go wrong, in so far as it neglects this broader context. Espen Hammer (2000) appears to commit this error in his claim that Adorno's critique of subjective idealism mirrors McDowell's critique of coherentism and foundationalism. Negative dialectic, Hammer argues, acknowledges against the "identitarian thinking" of subjective idealism and foundationalism that "there are indeed rational linkages between us and the world which make objective judgments possible" (p. 86). This risks imputing to Adorno a theory about how epistemological concepts are supposed to work *correctly*, rather than a theory attempting to "break epistemology open" (Adorno: 1993b, 66).[27] The working of the dialectic to subvert epistemology from within is here transformed into a thesis about how epistemological concepts should work. Adorno, I suggested, is interested in forcing epistemology to a self-awareness of its dependence on historical experience; thus the truth about epistemological concepts is found in what they reveal, *as expressive elements of language*, about historical experience, and it is their dependence on this experience that makes the reconciliation of subject and object impossible *within* epistemology.

When Adorno's dialectical concepts are read as straightforward epistemological concepts, the nature of his critique of conceptual language undergoes a serious distortion. We can see this in Finke's suggestion that non-identity can be read in terms of "non-inferential constraints" on thinking by way of the Sellars-McDowell idea of an extended space of reasons beyond the conceptual (2001, 78). But as a dialectical concept, nonidentity is not so much an independent argument about the rational conditions of conceptual thinking as it is the result of a movement in which concepts are driven to the point of contradiction. Nonidentity is that point in the dialectical movement when concepts become aware of their constitutive inadequacy, and this is only possible because of the transformation of concepts within the movement of thinking itself. This is why Adorno claims that contradiction is "non-identity under the aspect of identity" (1966, 17). Nonidentity is therefore the immanent revela-

tion of the insufficiency of concepts, the point at which the inadequacy of cognition as conceptual classification becomes accessible *within* the experience of the concept. But the reading of nonidentity as an epistemological concept transforms a negative dialectical experience into a positive theory. Nonidentity points toward the transformation of concepts, but it does so by revealing the alienation in the concept, not by filling in what is lacking from conceptual cognition.

McDowell and Adorno both share the insight into the baleful consequences that follow from the diremption of mind and world, and the consequent disenchantment of nature. But because Adorno believes that the epistemological problem is a symptom of the social-historical process of disenchantment he does not think that the problem can be solved *within* the terms of epistemology. It is this insight that makes it necessary to carry out the critique of epistemology as negative dialectic, rather than as a positive theory. Negative dialectic is grounded on the idea that *every individual concept is false*. This is not a sceptical thesis, it is rather an awareness of what our knowledge has become under the conditions of the destruction of experience. The task of dialectical presentation is to work towards the self-correction of the insufficiency of each concept. This is why everything depends on the movement, and what can be shown within it. Dialectic is therefore the self-transformation and the critical self-reflection of concepts at the tribunal of experience. To assert a self-standing theory about how mind relates to world would be to assume (falsely) that it is possible to overcome alienation without the transformation of our current, historically disfigured concepts.

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Conclusion

Critical Theory and Experience

The tradition of social theory associated with the Frankfurt School, of which Adorno is perhaps the best-known "first generation" representative, is not the only tradition in twentieth-century social philosophy to deal explicitly with problems of disenchantment incumbent on societal and cultural rationalization. There is a profound sense for these problems, for example, in John Dewey's pragmatism. The flattening out of everyday experience is a major concern of Dewey's philosophical writings, and his interest in art and religion as forms of experience is intelligible as an attempt to find the resources in these regions of culture for an idea of experience undistorted by the dualism of mind and world. Dewey's depiction of the fragmented nature of experience under the conditions of disenchantment is very similar to the notion of *habitude* that is a major theme of Bergson and Proust (and, *via* the Lukácsian concept of second nature, finds its way into the thinking of Frankfurt School theorists). One of the ultimate purposes of art on Dewey's conception, as Philip Jackson has argued, is "to awaken our sensibilities, causing us to see once again what we have come to overlook" (1998, 27). Art, for Dewey, serves as a model for what day to day experience *can* be like, were it not that artistic experience is exiled from the world under the sway of natural-scientific thinking.

More recently, Alasdair MacIntyre (1985) has produced a powerful account of the consequences of disenchantment in terms of its evisceration of the preconditions (both intellectual and social) of a meaningful moral life. MacIntyre begins *After Virtue* with the "disquieting suggestion" that our language (MacIntyre is concerned with our *moral* language) is a collection of ruins and fragments. We still *use* this language, MacIntyre argues, but the social and intellectual background necessary for justifying it and making it meaningful has disappeared. MacIntyre traces this development to the failure of what he calls the "enlightenment project," and its extraction of moral deliberation from its place within an encompassing ethical scheme sustained by the ends-directed nature of community practices (pp. 51–78). MacIntyre's

account of the instrumentalization of moral language resultant upon disenchantment is not dissimilar from Adorno's reading of the process of abstraction, the representation of experiential items as exemplars of a generalizable "value," underlying the withering of experience. The use of moral language, MacIntyre argues, now embodies an obliteration of the distinction between manipulative and nonmanipulative relations (p. 23). As, for Adorno, experiential items are now encountered as exemplars of a value detachable from them (and thus instrumentalized), so for MacIntyre moral language disguises the transformation of social encounters into means for the self's independently posited ends.

This way of reading the consequences of disenchantment appears to derive from a thesis about the constituting subject that is similar to Adorno's. But there is an important difference. To state this simply, what for Adorno is the evisceration of subjectivity through the organizing of social practices according to the logic of abstraction that defines the constituting subject becomes, on MacIntyre's account, the disintegration of the community and its practices and the setting free of the *egoistic* subject.[1] Diremption, on MacIntyre's account, becomes akin to the separation of the self from the community and its substantive understanding of goods, rather than a separation of a part of rationality from its place within the life of the subject. If Adorno is right, then the decay of moral language MacIntyre identifies would be attributable to a certain process of formation of the subject under modern conditions of disenchantment. The root of the distortion would then lie in the constriction of the cognitive worth of the experience of the subject, and its potential to disclose the moral significance of experiential situations.[2] This would call for a social theory capable of identifying the way this distortion operates, as a corrupted form of societal and cultural rationalization, on a social-structural level.

The most fundamental level at which these differences play themselves out, I want to suggest, is what distinguishes Adorno's account, as a type of critical social theory in the Frankfurt School tradition, from that of MacIntyre. MacIntyre (1990) develops the social diagnosis in *After Virtue* into a critique of the disembedded nature of the type of reasoning he takes to be constitutive of modernity. MacIntyre opposes this type of reasoning to the structure of reasoning in traditions, the rationality of which, he believes, presupposes membership in a moral community "from which fundamental dissent has to be excluded" (p. 60). Adorno, on the contrary, believes that the modern world and its form of philosophical inquiry contain the resources for its own successful self-critique. A central theme of this work has been that this self-critique takes place for Adorno in the disclosure of a type of experience that Adorno terms self-awareness. Negative dialectic is that process in which the restricted cognition definitive of the constituting subject comes to recognize the truth about its own history, and about itself as a partial form of the

cognitive potential of reason. It is the concept brought to the experience of its own inadequacy. It is in its self-reflection, then, that the type of reasoning that becomes dominant in enlightenment rationalization is able to criticize itself in the awareness of its own limitations.

My claim here places my reading of Adorno at odds with the powerful and influential critique of Adorno that sets the stage for Jürgen Habermas's transformation of critical social theory into a theory of communicative action. While a full treatment of Habermas's arguments for this "paradigm change" is beyond the scope of this study, I want at least to make some comments about what an Adornian response to Habermas might look like if my reconstruction of Adorno's negative dialectic as a theory of spiritual experience is accepted. It is worth noting, firstly, that Habermas's position seems clearly to have become less sympathetic and congenial to an Adornian standpoint over the last four decades. In an earlier work, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (originally published in 1968), Habermas defines the task of critical social theory as a form of "self-reflection" (*Selbstreflexion*). The idea that Habermas develops here of critique as a "self-reflection of the knowing subject," in which philosophy "passes over" (*geht über*) into the critique of ideology (1987a, 63), clearly owes much to the Adornian understanding of philosophy as *Selbstbesinnung*. As early as this work, however, Habermas's intention to shift critical theory in a more explicitly Kantian direction is clearly decipherable. The critique of knowledge is here conceived from the perspective of quasi-transcendental human interests. The interest in autonomy and responsibility (*Mündigkeit*) is identified as the interest associated with self-reflection. Within this framework, *Selbstreflexion* means something like explicitly thematizing the presuppositions of a worldview from the perspective of a world-governing interest. Already here, there is a separation between the articulation of a worldview and the standards of critique that is simply not present in Adorno's understanding of *Selbstbesinnung*.

By the time of the *Theory of Communicative Action*, with the aid of language theory, Habermas had deepened this division between substantive analysis and the (now purely formal) standards of critique. In this work, Habermas sets out to construct a procedural theory of critical rationality. The intention is to uncover the critical potential of language as a formal attribute identifiable prior to the movement of critical reflection.[3] I want to make two claims here. First, I want to suggest that Habermas's critique of Adorno only has bite if one accepts the claim that critical theory *must* be conceived in the Kantian fashion. And second, I want to suggest that there are good reasons why it should *not* follow the Kantian route of a formalizing of the standards of critique. The first point will occupy me in the rest of this section. I will take up the second point in the second and final section. The essential element of Habermas's critique of Adorno is that the latter fails to provide a *theory* of the

experiential capacity (Habermas refers to this as mimesis) that is a counter to instrumental cognition. The instrumentalized nature that suffers under disenchantment is confined to a "speechless accusation," bereft of language (1984, 382). The problem with the critique of instrumental reason in Adorno, Habermas is suggesting, is its "speechlessness." The critique of instrumental reason cannot *say* what it is that suffers under the sway of instrumental thinking. The problem for Adorno, as Habermas sees it, is that it is impossible to "transform mimetic impulses into insights," that is, into the terms of discursive reasoning (p. 384). Hence negative dialectic, for Habermas, "withdraws behind the lines of discursive thought" (p. 385).

On the interpretation of Adorno that I have urged in this work, it is possible at least to see how one might begin to respond to this criticism from an Adornian point of view. Adorno, as I have suggested, conceives instrumental thinking to be a certain constriction of legitimate cognition under the sway of a process of abstraction that defines the constitutive subject. Now given the problem as Adorno sees it, it is clear why the solution *cannot* be (as Habermas suggests) the transformation of the grounds of critique into the terms of discursive reasoning. This is because the problem lies in the tendency of discursive reasoning to sever itself from the operation of language as expression. What Habermas dismisses as the "speechlessness" of Adorno's work, its failure to reach the level of discursive insight, is in fact a consequence of Adorno's striving to recover *within* discursive thinking that expressive potential of language. Habermas assumes that any functioning critique must be stated in discursive form, as an identifiable set of theses. But what is fundamental to negative dialectic, I have suggested, is that it leads discursive reasoning to the point where it *shows* its own inadequacy, which is precisely its dependence on the expressive workings of language.[4]

Negative dialectic does not understand "critique" on the Kantian model endorsed by Habermas, which begins from the thematizing of formal standards. What characterizes Adorno's understanding of critique, and, I would argue, is one of its strengths, is that it ties critique to a transformation in our experience of what it is that is being judged. This is in fact implicit in the whole idea of philosophical writing as a process. What one has gained at the end of the process is not best thought of as a set of theses that can be measured against some part of the world. It is more like a certain self-awareness, in the sense of a change or transformation wrought by a process. In short, it is an experience. Now of course one might say that, after all, this looks like something that one *can* discursively *say*. But if I am right about Adorno's idea of negative dialectic, Adorno's claim would be that such a statement would cancel itself in the act of being said. It would assert the dependence of discursive reason while at the same time demonstrating the belief in discursive reason's capacity to transcend those limitations, or as Adorno puts it, to "say the

unsayable." This is why, as a form of critique, negative dialectic leads to the experience of what cannot be said. It does not lead us out of instrumental thinking, however. For Adorno, since our concepts are structured by the constituting subject, this is not something that it is within the power of philosophy to do. Rather, it leads instrumental thinking to the point where the limitations of its own cognitive potential become accessible to it *as* an experience.

What negative dialectic makes us aware of is something that our use of language as a tool for communication, or a medium for transferring contents, makes us forget. It is the potential of language to disclose experience through its expressive moment. I have suggested throughout that Adorno conceives this view of the cognitive potential of language in terms of its making possible what he calls spiritual experience. At the level of the critique of instrumental reason, I have suggested, this comprises the awareness of the dependence of our concepts on the historical experience that is expressed in them. But it is also, as we have seen, for Adorno the very presupposition *tout court* of philosophical interpretation. To "spiritualize" something on Adorno's account simply means to interpret that item—whether it be a concept, a social artifact, a piece of music, or whatever—as a surface on which experiential meaning has been expressed. As spiritual, these items "speak" about the world of which they are a part, because the world is ultimately revealed in the full disclosure of their experiential significance. Thus all phenomena, as monads, are windows onto the world.

It is certainly true, and Adorno himself often points this out, that this model of critique exposes itself to failure. There is no guarantee that a particular spiritualization will succeed; one concept or phenomenon may not prove to be as suitable for illuminating an aspect of experience as another. But this is a long way from the Habermasian critique that this strategy of philosophical interpretation is self-defeating. I am suggesting that it only appears self-defeating *if* one assumes that the function of critique is the identification of formal standards for judging something. But this is not the only way critique can work (in fact, by itself, as I shall suggest shortly, it is an extremely weak model of critique). Adorno's idea of critique brings about the self-awareness of the constricted concepts of instrumental thinking as the experience of their dependence on damaged life. The moment of critical judgment is not separable as a formal standard because it is simply the distance between what language strives to say, and what our mutilated concepts are able to put into words. But what it sacrifices through its absence of discursive clarity, it more than makes up for in its transformative power. It is, in the strong, Deweyan sense, an *experience*, because it makes us aware of what the ordinary operation of our concepts obscure from us: their very dependence on damaged life. Disclosing this dependence cannot take place by constructing another set of concepts. It is, Adorno would claim, a matter of how we *use*

concepts. In particular, we can use them to show something *through* them that would cancel itself if said *with* them.[5] This is the fundamental difference between Adorno's understanding of philosophy as *Selbstbesinnung*, and Habermas's Kantian understanding of critique.

Albrecht Wellmer (1991) comes close to the point I am trying to bring out here in his critique of Adorno from a Habermasian point of view. Wellmer takes seriously the issues posed by "running up against the limits of language," which he takes to be the answer to the "recurring problem of the speechlessness of language" (p. 75). But Wellmer goes on to oppose the possibility of "becoming empty of meaning and falling silent," and the possibility of "renewing and extending meaning." Wellmer wants to say that Adorno conceives the transcendence of speechlessness in messianic terms, and hence does not perceive the "resources within language," our everyday communicative language, that enable us to find words for what we want to say, and hence overcome our speechlessness.[6] But speechlessness cannot be so simply equated with the failure to say something. I would argue that speechlessness, on Adorno's view, does not denote, as Wellmer claims, the "better Other" of instrumental thinking as a world beyond discursive reason (p. 73–74). It is rather the recognition of language's dependence on experience as the condition of language's meaningfulness. What Wellmer takes to be a belief in the sole possibility of a "messianic" transcendence of the failure of words is simply the recognition of the consequences of that dependence. What language reflects on in speechlessness is the truth that language does not float free of the world; its capacity to mean is directed back in speechlessness to its condition of possibility in the experience expressed within it.[7] It is true that Adorno conceives philosophy as an aporetical striving, the attempt to say the unsayable. But this does not imply that it is a failed effort to say something. What matters, as Adorno says, is what happens in it; it is what our concepts reveal about experience in striving to put it into words.

COMMUNICATION THEORY AS AN OUTBREAK ATTEMPT

In the critique of what Habermas (1987b) calls "subject-centered reason," the theory of communicative action reveals itself clearly as another attempted "outbreak" from the cognitive limitations of constitutive subjectivity. Habermas has described these limitations in terms of the restriction of rationality to dealing purposefully (instrumentally) with objects, and implementing purposive-rational plans. In terms of subject-centered reason, Habermas asserts, the "relationship of the human being to the world is cognitivistically reduced" (p. 311). This is what motivates Habermas's calls for the transition to a new communicative paradigm of rationality. From an Adornian point of view, it might

look at first glance like Habermas is simply repeating the doomed Husserlian-Bergsonian call to leap outside the constituting subject. There is a danger here that, by making the outbreak too easy, one is really ensuring that it is no outbreak at all. The search for a new beginning, or a new paradigm, is not necessarily a sign of failure. But there is a legitimate question about how we think about the *weight* of constituting subjectivity on our thinking. Adorno's philosophical work, of course, is marked by a profound sense of the weightiness of the constituting subject. While one can perhaps legitimately criticize Adorno for inflating the sense of thought's confinement, there is surely an opposing error in not taking the weightiness of that confinement seriously enough. This would be true, I think, for an argument that reduced constituting subjectivity to a mere *theoretical* mistake. Whilst Habermas is certainly not guilty of this, he is clearly closer to this position on the question of weightiness than Adorno. But there is also a sense in which Habermas's outbreak attempt is more radical in its intention to decenter the subject and return it to the context of communicative praxis. For Habermas, this offers the opportunity to leave subject-centered thinking behind entirely.

The question of how well the issue of weightiness has been dealt with must of course be answered by an assessment of the success of a new paradigm in dealing with unresolved problems. While I cannot provide anything like a full account of this issue here, it is worth noting that the formalism and proceduralism of Habermas's theory have often been identified as serious problems that weaken its effectiveness.[8] From the Adornian perspective that I have expounded in this work, the question is whether these consequences are the inevitable result of a failed outbreak, or whether, as Habermas would claim, they simply reflect what is possible for a philosophy that is aware of its postmetaphysical limitations. The worry evinced by the former possibility would be that by reverting to a purely procedural formulation of philosophy, as determining procedures for the validity of generalizable norms, Habermas is simply building into communicative reason the same work of abstraction that, for Adorno, characterizes the constituting subject. Like Husserlian phenomenology, Habermas's communication theory would then be left grasping the dregs of experience. Its outbreak would be yet another outbreak into the mirror. On the latter view, communicative rationality's proceduralism would be a way of saving philosophy from getting entangled in questions that it cannot resolve.

Hans Joas has noted the disappearance from Habermas's more recent work of the "almost utopian" optimistic undertone to the earlier thesis of a "linguistification of the sacred" in the communicative paradigm (1997, 282). Habermas, Joas notes, now talks of the "weak power of rational motivation" when describing what is achievable from the perspective of communicative rationality. The consequence, Joas argues, is that Habermas gives short shrift to the binding power of human language by reducing the communicative role

of language to an exchange of arguments. In defending his proceduralist version of moral cognitivism, furthermore, Habermas has endorsed a series of significant diremptions, between, in particular, the practice of moral justification and motivation, moral discourse and ethical identity, and custom or tradition and knowledge. Joas argues that the division between the ethical and the moral is especially damaging because it privatizes the significance of the commitment to a value experienced as transcendent to the self (p. 286–88). From an Adornian point of view, there is something disquieting about the way Habermas presents, and indeed endorses these diremptions. While there is surely some truth in Habermas's claim that the problem of "weakness of the will" cannot be solved through moral cognition (1993, 80), it also seems clear that this way of posing the problem deepens the sense of alienation of the subject from its world. What should be of concern to Habermas is whether it is the weight of disenchantment that is making itself felt in this dissecting of communicative rationality from substance; if it is persuasive to say that Habermas's concepts are being pulled toward repeating the movement of abstraction that (on Adorno's view) defines subject-centered reason, then communicative reason would appear to be another failed outbreak attempt.

One consequence of Habermas's turn to communication theory has been a less acute sense of the role of philosophy as operating at what Wellmer calls the frontiers of language (1991, 84). As Joel Whitebook has argued, the theory of communication seems too comfortably encamped on *this* side of the border, in the interior regions of the linguistic realm (1993, 63–64). For Adorno, this issue concerns language's attunement to its expressive element. There is always, for Adorno, a tension between this element, which is the disclosive potential of language, and the communication of contents by means of language. Adorno's attachment to the idea of a reconciliation of subject and object, which Habermas takes to be an overburdening of reason's communicative potential, is motivated by a sense of the emptiness of a language that loses contact with its potential to disclose experience. It is important to recall here that Adorno's reading of the wrong done by the constituting subject concerns its delegitimization of the cognitive role of the experiencing subject. This is why, for Adorno, philosophy must involve a constant self-correction of language, so that the significance with which the world reveals itself to the subject can find its way to expression. This idea finds literary expression in Proust's distinction between the social self and the aesthetic self. Unless it is informed by the depth, the *profondeur*, of the solitary work of artistic creation, Proust's narrator suggests, conversation becomes a sort of "superficial rambling" (1999a, 709). Adorno would want to claim that there is a similar relationship at work between the moments of communication and expression in philosophical interpretation. The danger of superficiality is here a danger that the exchanges of communicative reason will simply not engage the experienc-

ing subject at the level that makes possible the right kind of critical self-reflection. If my interpretation of Adorno is right, then it is clear that he demands a type of self-reflection that reveals the world in its experiential depth. The movement of self-awareness, Adorno believes, must be a disclosure of what the subject has experienced; it is in fact the exhaustive significance of this experience. The risk for the procedural theory of communication endorsed by Habermas is that it seems to be insensitive to this problem of a reification of communicative language.

Habermas has of course made clear his opposition to this view of what philosophy can accomplish. In his critique of Charles Taylor's (1989) situating of the question of moral justification in the broader framework of the modern identity, Habermas asserts that "[w]orld-disclosing arguments that induce us to see things in a radically different light are not essentially philosophical arguments and *a fortiori* not ultimate justifications" (1993, 79). But it is hard to imagine what a justification would *be* that did not possess some world-disclosive force.[9] The broader question that looms is whether this division of labor is itself an effect of disenchantment, rather than a response to it. It would be wrong to present this issue solely in terms of whether Adorno and others are overburdening philosophy, however. There is a clear sense in which, in Adorno's case at least, what is demanded is both more and less than what Habermas asks of philosophy, and in both senses the relevant issue is the understanding of philosophy's dependence. Adorno asks for less because he does not believe that philosophy is capable of conjuring up a discursive representation of utopia. Because our concepts operate under the sway of the constituting subject, all we can do is to bring the suffering subject to self-awareness. And it is solely in self-awareness, for Adorno, that the subject asserts its spontaneity and freedom in relation to nature. But, as I have argued, there is also a sense in which Adorno demands more of philosophy than Habermas. Although it cannot develop clear discursive standards, it *can* lead concepts toward the experience of suffering that is the inverse image of reconciliation. This would be a philosophy capable of recovering spiritual experience in the age of its disappearance.

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Notes

Introduction

1. Adorno evidences the direct influence of Proust on this project in his mention, in a letter to Thomas Mann, of the origin of the idea of a spiritualization through "idiosyncratic exactness" in Proust (1974c, 679).

2. J. M. Bernstein provides an exemplary elucidation of the importance of this distinction to Adorno's critique of what I am calling classificatory thinking (2001, 306–19). My account here mirrors his in important respects.

3. Martin Jay (1984) rightly notes that experience is the key concept in Adorno's critique of modern philosophy.

4. I discuss this below, and more fully in chapter 1.

5. This is true both of Sherry Weber Nicholsen's excellent translation of *Drei Studien zu Hegel* and E. B Ashton's deficient translation of *Negative Dialektik*. In her seminal study on Adorno, Gillian Rose (1978) also adopts the translation "intellectual experience."

6. I am here borrowing the terminology of Robert Brandom's "inferentialist" reading of Kant (2002, 46). I am using Brandom's terms simply to illustrate the distinction between Adorno's view and the basic structure of determinate judgment.

7. To use one of Brandom's examples: to determine something in terms of the conceptual content "copper coin" is to license the inference "it melts at 1084 degrees" (2002, 6).

8. I will spell out this argument in detail in chapter 1.

9. For the record, here are the page references: (1966, 21, 22, 41[*4], 55, 57, 64).

10. 1966, 172, 189.

Chapter 1. The Consequences of Disenchantment

1. This is in essence an echo of the motivating insights of the *Lebensphilosophie* generation, of whom Simmel and Bergson in particular were important influences on Adorno. Though this certainly does not mean that Adorno's thought is describable as

lebensphilosophisch. It is the insight about what goes wrong with rationalization that attracts Adorno to these thinkers, not their purported solutions.

2. Bernstein, it must be noted, is attempting to reconstruct the ethical focus of Adorno's thinking. My focus in this work is more on the social-critical and self-reflective role of philosophy as Adorno sees it.

3. Adorno, he argues, shows that "concepts, as vehicles for cognition and with respect to meaning, are *dependent* upon, and hence not detachable from, what they are about" (2001, 229).

4. To anticipate here: if critique is able to reveal philosophical works *as* expression, then it will be possible to bring that process to self-awareness. This is key to Adorno's critical strategy.

5. This sharp division is the process that Hegel referred to as *Entzweiung*, or diremption. I will come back to this idea later in this chapter.

6. I am referring, of course, to Kant's claim that "intuitions without concepts are blind" (1974, 98).

7. This theme is obviously one of the animating ideas of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Adorno 1972a, 26, 54). *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was written jointly at a time of an immensely productive convergence of thinking between Adorno and Max Horkheimer. For the purposes of this work, however, I will ignore the question of the distinct contribution of each author. All references to this text are attributed to Adorno simply for ease of reference.

8. While Adorno's reading of disenchantment ties its harmful effects to the formation of the subject *as* the constituting subject, it would certainly not be true to say that Adorno's philosophy boils down to a critique of idealism. Kantian idealism is the philosophical inscription of disenchantment at one particular moment in its history. At a later stage in this history, the process of disenchantment finds expression in the radical empiricist notion of experience that underlies positivist thinking. What connects positivism to idealism is its conception of objectivity as "purified of all subjective projections" (Adorno 1972b, 285). The blind particulars that wait on the synthesizing activity of the subject for a determination of their worth on the idealist picture, have become the brute givens, or "sense data" of positivism, shorn of all subjective significance. This is why the empiricist conception of experience in positivism is, for Adorno, simply idealism without the hubris.

9. The clearest indication of this influence in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* occurs in the following passage: "In every century, any living reminiscence of olden times, not only of nomadic antiquity but all the more of the pre-patriarchal stages, was most rigorously punished and extirpated from human consciousness. The spirit of enlightenment replaces the fire and the rack by the stigma attached to all irrationality, because it leads to ruin [*ins Verderben führt*]" (Adorno 1972a, 31 [translation altered]).

10. Gillian Rose overstates the case in her claim that the connection with Nietzsche informs "all of [Adorno's] *oeuvre*" (1978, 18). While the connection is certainly there, it is not there in the direct way that Rose claims it is.

11. *Habitude* is to action, Bergson suggests, what generality is to thinking (1939, 173).

12. It is the notion of *habitude* that, in a mutated form, finds expression in the Lukácsian concept of "second nature."

13. Adorno himself consistently draws this parallel. See, for example, Adorno (1966, 149–51).

14. I am here referring to John McDowell's (1994) powerful analysis of disenchantment. I will have much to criticize in his account later on in this work, however I believe he has identified the problem succinctly.

15. Diamond traces this transformation in its philosophical manifestation to Frege (1988, 266).

16. This is an interesting example, not least because Diamond's comments evoke comparisons with Adorno's reflections on Kant's employment of the concept of "humanity" as embodying the distinction between the "idea of humanity" and the "collection of all human beings" (1966, 255). The understanding of the concept purely in the latter sense would be equivalent to the reduction to pure classification.

17. Diamond notes that this idea cannot be accommodated by the addition of an "evaluative extra" to the pure descriptive content. This distinction is simply not applicable to this concept in its lived significance.

18. Diamond is well aware of the distinction I am drawing here. She rightly attributes a similar claim to Alasdair MacIntyre. It is unclear how far Diamond endorses this perspective in her own account. See Diamond (1988, 255–59).

19. This gets to the heart of Adorno's dependence thesis which I shall clarify more fully in due course. It should be noted also that Adorno's (1964) critique of Heideggerian "jargon" turns on his belief that Heidegger is guilty of this error. Heidegger, Adorno believes, assumes that substantial, meaningful concepts *are* philosophically available.

20. Especially in chapters 3 and 6.

21. With the exception of Merleau-Ponty, all will be central to this work.

22. Benjamin (1972), of course, develops this idea most explicitly. However, it is also an important part of the critique of (what I am calling) scientific rationalism in Proust (1999a, 2281), Merleau-Ponty (1969, 90), and, in the call for a language that adopts "the very movement of the interior life of things," Bergson (1938, 213).

23. Although Benjamin does, of course, sometimes talk in this way. The clearest example of Adorno's opposition to the thesis of the arbitrary nature of signification is in Adorno (1971c).

24. Alternative formulations can be found, among other places, in Adorno (1972b, 318), and Adorno (1973, 91–92).

25. The tendency of the enlightenment, Adorno claims, has been to divest philosophical terms of "all of their historical associations and connotations" (1973, 66). The

recovery of these associations, Adorno believes, is indispensable to the truth content of philosophical works.

26. I will argue in the next chapter that this links Adorno very closely to Wittgenstein.

27. Ermanno Bencivenga offers a nice illustration of the difference between this interpretive practice and conceptual classification (2000, 28). Bencivenga makes this point in terms of the notion of family resemblances. What makes it possible for individuals born at different times, with distinctive biographies, experiences, and interests to be brought under the concept "member of the Brown family," he suggests, is that they can be revealed as elements of one and the same process. To "comprehend" the "Brown family" is just to understand the course of the narrative from member A to member Z. The concept "Brown family" is not something extracted from these individuals as though it were an isolable feature they have in common. It is the story of the development of the concept "Brown family" in its movement through historical time. The universal is here not a separable property, but rather the narrative thread that joins the members one to another. In the terms I have been using, it is immanent in the particulars themselves as the figure formed by their relationship.

28. I discuss this in chapter 6.

29. It is my belief that this distinction between what can be said, and what can be expressed but not directly said, is crucial to understanding what negative dialectic is all about. I will approach Adorno's interpretation of this idea from two different but complementary directions. First, Adorno's reading of the say/show distinction in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, and second, Walter Benjamin's theory of language.

30. I am therefore in full agreement with Brian O'Connor (2004a) that negative dialectic is comprehensible as the outline of a form of what he calls "critical rationality." My account of what this idea implies is nonetheless different from his in stressing that the dependence on the object integral to this idea must be conceived in social-historical terms.

31. This important idea is too often drastically oversimplified as a version of the (allegedly) late-Wittgensteinian thesis on the social dependence of linguistic meaning (see, e.g., Espen Hammer's claim that the issue for a negative dialectic is to acknowledge "the communal and non-subjective constraints on meaning" [2000, 80]). The problem with this interpretation is that it severs the dependence thesis from its role as a part of the critical strategy of philosophical interpretation. I try to bring out that connection here.

32. This will become clearer in the discussion of Husserl, in chapter 4.

33. "Thought forms," Hegel suggests, are "made available and set down in human language. . . . In all of that which becomes something inner, a representation as such for man, something that he makes his own, language has penetrated" (1969, 20).

34. It is understandable therefore why Adorno's lecture notes on negative dialectic describe Bergson's "resistance to the de-temporalization [*Entzeitlichung*] of thinking" as the "core of a concept of spiritual experience" (2003a, 221).

35. I emphasize this point because I believe it marks a significant difference between the account I am developing and Bernstein's (2001) notion of conceptual abstraction (which otherwise I have been deeply influenced by). Bernstein speaks of the "logical" aspect of the concept versus its "material" aspect (which, he suggests, is opened up by rhetoric). To speak of a "material axis" of the concept that is "not fully discursive" risks collapsing into the static properties view. The risk becomes clear in the description of what gets cut away from the concept of torture ("the coldness of the branding, the smell and imaged pain" [2001, 318]). I would put the difference this way: whereas Bernstein's account of abstraction uses Kantian reflective judgment as its basic model, my reading argues that Adorno wants to Hegelianize this through the idea of mediation, where what undergoes abstraction is precisely the social-temporal contextuality of the thing.

36. This is why I emphasized earlier that negative dialectic is resolutely negative.

37. Also: "what appears as the power of subjective form, which constitutes reality, is in truth the result of that historical process, in which the subjectivity that detaches itself and thereby objectifies itself, projects itself as the total master of nature . . ." (Adorno 1972b, 303); and "the forms that epistemology considers to constitute knowledge depend as much on the content of knowledge as vice-versa" (Adorno 1993b, 65).

38. I shall explain this idea in more detail in the discussion of language and expression in Adorno and Benjamin, in chapter 3.

39. The force of this *must* is none other than language's own striving to express experience, to put it into words. I will come back to this later.

40. The term "natural history" itself comes from Benjamin's book. See Benjamin (1974b, 227).

41. Lukács would later stress the "contemplative" character of commodified thinking in his *History and Class Consciousness*.

42. As Michael Forster points out, long before the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel had come to the view that modern Europeans' outlook was characterized by a series of sharp and fundamental dualisms (1998, 22).

Chapter 2. Saying the Unsayable

1. This is reformulated in the very last sentence of the book, as "whereof one cannot speak, thereof must one be silent" (1989a, §7).

2. Conant is speaking about Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard, but as I shall argue, the point applies equally to Adorno. I shall return to Conant's point later in this chapter.

3. Habermas's well-known idea of a form of intersubjectivity founded on mutual understanding is supposed to elucidate the classical philosophical concepts of freedom and reconciliation (Habermas 1984, 391).

4. Carnap (1959) provides an exemplary depiction of this project.

5. James Conant (2002) makes a very solid argument that, in fact, it is incoherent.

6. Quoted in Nedo and Ranchetti (1983, 255). The letter itself is dated August 8, 1932.

7. Alasdair MacIntyre (1985) develops a similar account of the disenchantment of moral language.

8. Herbert Schnädelbach, for example, suggests that Adorno is constructing a "narrative philosophy of history," a history that explicates history itself, and hence constitutes an *urhistory* (1992, 235).

9. But the life to which the concept is returned is the reified world. The concept's entanglement in this context is visible, not as traces of a living unity, but as the marks of suffering inscribed on a corpse. Through the self-reflection of the concept, negative dialectic makes the world of reification accessible *as* an experience, the experience of the death of life.

10. As Matthew Ostrow puts it, for Wittgenstein "there is nothing for us to *do* to satisfy these [philosophical] concerns. . . . It is these concerns themselves that are the source of our fundamental unease" (2002, 132).

11. A similar perspective on culture is evident in the claim that "God is not to be faulted if habit and routine and lack of passion and affectation and chatter with neighbors right and left gradually corrupt most people, so that they become thoughtless" (1992, 47), and "every human being who has passion is always somewhat solitary; it is only drivelers who are swallowed up in social life" (1992, 428).

12. I discuss Benjamin's view of language in depth in the next chapter.

13. I borrow this formulation from Russell Nieli (1987, 89).

14. In an original interpretation of the *Tractatus*, David Rozema (2002) has argued that Wittgenstein is furnishing a poetic presentation of the barren nature of the Russelian philosophical scheme. Wittgenstein, Rozema argues, brings to light what is wrong with this view of philosophy by showing that everything of importance has no place within it.

15. Quoted in Russell Nieli (1987, 75).

16. The poem concerns itself with the growth of a sprig leaf into a hawthorn.

17. As the preface puts it, "The limit can therefore only be drawn in language, and what lies on the other side of the limit will be pure nonsense (*einfach Unsinn*)" (1989a, 2).

18. These comments, I believe, are in line with Marie McGinn's (1999) suggestion that a successful interpretation of the *Tractatus* must do away with the problematic idea in the "metaphysical" reading of there being "ineffable truths," but at the same avoid the problem in the therapeutic reading that there seems to be "no genuine insight that is not ultimately obliterated in the final act of self-annihilation." One way to

square this circle, I am arguing, is by adopting the "Adornian" idea that it is the self-awareness of language *as* disenchanted that is the goal of the *Tractatus*.

19. Also, "For the clarity that we are aiming at is indeed *complete* clarity. But this simply means that the philosophical problems should *completely* disappear" (1953, §133).

20. Wittgenstein says, in a note dated 25.5.15 that "The drive towards the mystical comes from the lack of satisfaction of our wishes through science" (1989a, 177).

21. I will explore this more fully in the next section.

22. In a letter to Bertrand Russell, in 1919 (quoted in Edwards [1985, 11]), Wittgenstein says that the "main point" of the book is what can be "said," *and* what cannot be "said" by propositions but can only be "shown." Hence the book must be read in terms of what it leaves out which, I am claiming, is the type of experience inaccessible to disenchanted concepts.

23. This is a reference to Wittgenstein's assertion that "everything that can be thought at all, can be thought clearly. Everything that lets itself be expressed, lets itself be clearly expressed" (1989a, §4.116).

24. This is a phrase that Adorno (1970a) uses to describe Husserl.

Chapter 3. Adorno and Benjamin on Language as Expression

1. This is the key to understanding Adorno's critique of Heidegger. I will say more about this later in this chapter. I will return to the broader issue in far greater depth in the discussion of the "outbreak" attempts of Edmund Husserl and Henri Bergson.

2. The essay was in fact a letter to Gershom Scholem which "ended up being eighteen pages long" (Benjamin 1994, 81).

3. Anja Hallacker (2004) provides a helpful account of how Benjamin draws on the biblical idea of a *lingua adamica* in his early reflections on language.

4. This is illustrated in the discussion of the human capacity of name-giving. Man is not the content or referent of the language of naming. Rather, this language is a communication of man's spiritual being (p. 144).

5. Quoted in Menninghaus (1980, 13).

6. It is significant that Adorno, in his 1962–63 lectures on philosophical terminology, equates the central concept of "presentation" (*Darstellung*) with the idea of "style" (1973, 56).

7. This is what Benjamin tries to establish in his analyses of the *Trauerspiel*, and in his researches on Charles Baudelaire. I will discuss the *Trauerspiel* study shortly.

8. As Howard Caygill puts this point, human language, instead of being seen as the "speculative condition" of all language, is instead read as only a "particular surface of expression and communication" (1998, 18).

9. In his insightful study of Benjamin's language essay, Michael Bröcker argues as follows: "The theory that truth cannot be attributed to assertions or states of affairs, but rather that this presents itself *in* language, is directed against the view that knowledge is a performance of a (transcendental) subjectivity. Against the representation of reason as an autonomous intelligible entity, Benjamin must cancel the difference between knower and known if he wants to comprehend truth as being" (1993, 115).

10. Benjamin will return to this idea in the *Trauerspiel* study, when he will try to show that the arbitrariness of language can be made to work expressively. The thesis that he will develop in the *Trauerspiel* study (to be discussed below) is already prefigured in the language essay in the reference to the "magic of judgement," in other words, the expressive power harbored in abstract or "fallen" language (1977a, 153).

11. Adorno had also held a seminar on Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* book at the University of Frankfurt in 1932, around the time that these two early essays were written.

12. Objective interpretation, Bröcker (1993, 219) argues, does not seek to make statements about things, but rather attempts to bring the things themselves to speak, through the revelation of their truth content in presentation.

13. In the lectures on philosophical terminology, Adorno suggests that Bergson's notion of intuition, Husserlian *Anschauung*, and Heidegger's concept of being are all (unsuccessful) attempts to translate what is given in a primordial experience prior to its conceptual preparation (1973, 85). I will discuss in later chapters why negative dialectic succeeds where these theories fail.

14. Adorno elsewhere says that the criterion of clarity would be suitable only for a "static subject" and a "static object," that is, a subject and object outside of historical time (1993b, 99).

15. The riskiness of this practice is implied in the statement that the affinity of the essay to "open spiritual experience" must be "paid for" with the loss of certainty of established thinking (1974f, 21). As Adorno puts this elsewhere, the "open thought" is constantly at risk of going astray (1966, 45).

16. The metaphor also occurs in Adorno (1993b, 107) and Adorno (1973, 34).

17. I will deal with the differences between Adorno and McDowell in the final chapter. Here, I only want to emphasize the similarities. Although McDowell's comments are restricted to the operations of practical, not theoretical reason, they clearly open the way for an extension to the latter.

18. Further occurrences of this idea include the references to the "opening up [*eröffnen*] of the multiplicity of the divergent" (1966, 18), the "opening up" (*auftun*) of the nonconceptual (p. 21), the "open [*das Offene*] and uncovered" (p. 31), and to the speculative power that "blasts open" (*aufsprengen*) the dissoluble (p. 38).

19. As I will show in a subsequent chapter, this is of central importance for Adorno's critique of Husserlian phenomenology, as what Adorno calls the "system in decay" (1970a, 215)

20. In the *Antrittsvorlesung*, Adorno traces this failure through the various strands of neo-Kantianism and their efforts to recover the connection between logical cate-

gories and reality (1971a, 326). Whereas the Marburg School sacrifices all rights to reality for the sake of systematic conclusiveness, Simmelian *Lebensphilosophie* maintains contact with reality but at the cost of the ability to organize it in rational terms. Finally, the "values" of the South-West school remain lost in a no-man's land between logical necessity and "psychological multiplicity."

21. This point was discussed in the previous chapter.

22. As Kaufmann puts this, the constellation "is the only representation that will not traduce the idea, that will convey the Name without desecrating it" (2000, 68).

23. This is why, as I argued previously, the difference between Adorno's exhortation to strive to say the unsayable and Wittgenstein's silence is crucial.

24. The "primordial image [*Urbild*]" of the interpretive procedure, Adorno claims, can be won from the insight into the relationship between nature and history (2001, 187).

25. It is the critique of reification developed by Lukács, the dissolving of rigidified social forms, that Adorno has in mind here.

26. Adorno means their susceptibility to natural decay, but the theological motif of the "fallen" state of nature is also implied here.

27. A similar phrase in the 1964–65 lectures runs: "The light that illuminates the fragmentary, disintegrating phenomena that have become split off is the sole hope that philosophy can ignite at all" (2001, 186).

Chapter 4. Failed Outbreak I: Husserl

1. Occasionally it comes to the surface in Husserl's works, as for instance in the reference to the "spiritual distress [*geistige Not*] of our age that has indeed become unbearable" (Husserl 1910, 336).

2. Adorno claims that it is through the concept of "evidence," central to Husserl's phenomenological understanding of cognition, that cognition becomes subordinated to the positivist ideal of the "mere taking in" (*bloßes Hinnehmen*) of irreducible facts (1970a, 63).

3. This is why references to the exchange process are peppered throughout Adorno's book on Husserl. See, for example, the reference to exchange value as a "social relationship that is unaware of itself" (1970a, 76).

4. Hence Adorno's statement that logical absolutism correctly registers the fact that validity is not exhausted by its historical function as an instrument of the domination of nature (1970a, 87).

5. "Husserl is right when he disputes the immediate identity of insight and state of affairs, of genesis and validity for the developed scientific consciousness and the irrevocable condition of reification; he is wrong when he hypostatizes that difference" (1970a, 85).

6. Adorno's statement of this argument occurs in Adorno (1970a, 80–81).

7. Adorno is here echoing quite closely Durkheim's point that "apriorism" is in fact a registering of the force of social consensus, a force which at the same time it cannot account for (1995, 16).

8. Again, however, Husserl reveals himself to be a faithful historical scribe of the conditions of alienation, since the hypostatization of validity expresses perfectly the separation between the individual and the logic of the social process that confronts it as an alien force.

9. Heidegger went on to concretize this essence in cultural and historical terms, as *Sein*, in *Being and Time*. See Heidegger's reference to *Sein* as the "sober sense of the much ventilated so-called phenomenological *Wesensschau*" in his 1927 lectures on phenomenology (1982, 115).

10. This, as we will see, differentiates him from Bergson, for whom intuition is by definition external to scientific thinking.

11. In the 1960/61 lectures on Ontology and Dialectic, Adorno discusses the "remarkable reduction or curtailment of the concept of the subject" in the transition from Kant to Heidegger (2002, 143).

12. A chamber or cabinet containing zoological and mineralogical artifacts.

13. This word is taken from Husserl (1922, 265).

CHAPTER 5. FAILED OUTBREAK II: BERGSON

1. See Adorno (1966, 20–21, 57; 1993b, 55; 2003a, 106–10).

2. See also Adorno (1970a, 74).

3. I do not mean to suggest that Bergson was the sole proponent, and certainly not the originator of this idea. The theoretical groundwork for this account, as Keith Ansell Pearson (2002) has demonstrated, is already established in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Whether Adorno got this idea exclusively from Bergson or not is less important than whether Bergson's typically systematic way of developing the thought illuminates the nature and purpose of Adorno's reinscription of the thesis.

4. "What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men" (Adorno 1972a, 4). Also "Enlightenment behaves towards things as a dictator towards men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them" (p. 9).

5. It is the account in *Creative Evolution* that I have in mind here. I will return to this later.

6. Philosophical positivism is simply the theoretical intensification of this process, with its compulsive attempt to eliminate all animistic traces in language—the "taboo" on knowledge that "really concerned the object" (1972a, 14).

7. "The exchange principle, the reduction of human labor to the abstract universal principle of average labor time, is related in an originary way to the identification principle" (1966, 149).

8. In the *Essay*, it may seem as though Bergson conceives this distinction as marking the different between the exterior world of objects and the interior world of mental life. This is not quite the case however. As Frédéric Worms (2004) has argued, Bergson perceives mental life as an *exemplary* form of a nonnumerical multiplicity. The distinction itself cuts through the difference between the mental and the world of objects.

9. Like Proust, Bergson has something of a fascination with dreams and sleep. The reason for this is the role of these experiences in canceling or unhinging the practical imperatives that govern our day to day classificatory schemes. See Bergson (1939, 90, 171).

10. Bergson, of course, is not the sole originator here. One should also certainly mention Freud. For a fuller discussion of the turn to memory as a tool of criticism in Bergson, Proust, Benjamin, Adorno, and others, see the excellent discussion in David Gross (2000, 25–76).

11. My understanding of this part of Bergson's theory owes much to David Gross (1985 and 2000).

12. It was for this reason that Bergson proposed a mode of access to things that did not depend on the workings of intelligence. Bergson called this form of cognition, which would be a contact with "pure" perception, "intuition." We should take note at this point that Bergson's argument is based on the assumption that practical interests corrupt any effort to reach a deeper experience of the thing. Bergson was never able to envisage a process *within* the concept for opening up thinking toward the object. This is the essence of Adorno's criticism of Bergson. Adorno believes that it is possible to use language to work against the instrumental function of the classificatory concept. By the arrangement of a concept in language, it should therefore become possible to bring about a dilation of the scheme of motor memory from within.

13. Bergson states that "*we practically only ever perceive the past*, the pure present being the ungraspable progress of the past gnawing its way into the future" (1939, 167). In other words, perception is always already saturated by the habitual schemes that organize possibilities of action.

14. At the base, Bergson argues, all images would differ from a current perception, hence none would be repeatable, because "if one takes them with the multiplicity of their details, two memories are never identically the same thing" (1939, 186–87). In another sense, of course, they can *all* be compared to a current perception, providing that one focuses on a detail that can make their similarity apparent. The point here is that the two sides of the concept, generality and particularity, are in a dynamic tension.

15. This is revealed by Bergson's frequent references to an obscure "fringe" that surrounds the "luminous core" of the intelligence (1941, 46). This fringe, Bergson (1941, 49) suggests, is the trace of the life principle that has not cut itself to the proportions of the special form of our intellectual organization.

16. The use of "act" here indicates that Adorno intends to encompass Husserl as well as Bergson in this criticism.

17. This "turning around [*détourner*]" of attention, Bergson claims, is simply "philosophy itself" (1938, 153).

18. This Sellarsian phrase is used by John McDowell (1994) whom I will discuss more fully in chapter 7 of this work.

19. As I shall argue in the next chapter, Adorno finds the key insight for this argument in Marcel Proust's critique of literary realism.

20. See Beatrice Longuenesse (1981) for a more elaborate defense of this point.

21. Simply stated, this principle asserts that, for any proposition, P, it is true that (P or not-P).

CHAPTER 6. PROUST: EXPERIENCE REGAINED

1. This is expressed nicely by Proust's narrator in the following passage: "although the intelligence is not the most subtle instrument, the most powerful, or the most appropriate in order to seize the true, that is only one more reason to begin with the intelligence and not with an intuitionism of the unconscious, a faith in consummate premonitions. . . . Thus, it is the intelligence itself which, in becoming aware of [the] superiority [of other powers], rationally abdicates before them, and accepts to become their collaborator and their servant" (1999a, 1922).

2. In the 1964–65 lectures on history and freedom, Adorno describes Proust's masterwork as "the greatest novel of [the twentieth] century" (2001, 185).

3. The value in question is transferable, or "exchangeable" because it picks out an object according to what it shares in common with other things.

4. The full passage reads: "If I can reflect correctly to a degree, when I began to concern myself with philosophy, I was not actually concerned with finding that much touted Truth; I wanted rather much more to be able to express that which occurs to me about the world, what I experience as something essential about the world."

5. I am thinking here of Richard Rorty's (1989) liberal ironist who *uses* philosophical language for private purposes of self-description.

6. Deleuze (1986) suggests an interpretation of this sort.

7. The thrust of these comments chimes with the spirit of the later work of Merleau-Ponty. See for example Merleau-Ponty (1964, 154–58).

8. It is this point, I think, that Merleau-Ponty wanted to express when he spoke of the Proustian essence as the "lining" (*doublure*), the "depth" (*profondeur*) of the world of sense (1964, 195). Experiences, he claims, are not merely an *opportunity* to encounter an idea. Rather, ideas "hold their authority, their fascinating—indestructible—power precisely from the fact that they shine through behind the sensible or from its heart" (p. 197).

9. The logic of exchange value, of course, is that of instrumental reason.

10. I discussed this example more fully in chapter 1.

11. This recalls Lukács's use of the term to denote the structure of social relations that begins to operate independently of the will of social subjects (1971, 86, 128). Man in capitalist society, Lukács argues, "confronts a reality 'made' by himself (as a class) which appears to him to be a natural phenomenon alien to himself; he is wholly at the mercy of its 'laws'" (1971, 135).

12. Adorno uses the German, *Bezugssystem*, followed by the English.

13. It was in Kant, for Adorno, that this movement found its most complete philosophical expression.

14. I discussed the critiques of Adorno and Benjamin in chapter 3 of this work.

15. As I emphasized previously, the categorization of these meanings as *merely* subjective presupposes the process of disenchantment that establishes the subject-object encounter as an opposition of classifying form and blind content. The Adornian alternative is to think of these terms as mediated through and through. Starting from the object, one can move backward to the (practical and intellectual) activity of the subject that mediates its appearance as a given item independent of subjectivity, or one can start from the subject and work backwards to series of interactions with the object that constitute it as a subject. The more one learns about the subject, the more one illuminates the true nature of the object, and vice versa.

16. My discussion of this section draws on Joshua Landy's insightful interpretation of this episode (2004, 51–84).

17. And also, I would add, for the philosopher. I will begin to make this argument shortly.

18. For a detailed examination of this thematic in Proust's novel, see Hoenig-Winz (1989).

19. Adorno comes close to a thesis of this sort in the "idealism as rage" section of *Negative Dialectic*. See Adorno (1966, 33–35).

20. The schemata that form *habitude*, taken as a whole, would therefore comprise the structure of constitutive subjectivity.

21. This idea ought not to be understood along schopenhauerian lines as a thesis about the ontological link between suffering and the nature of reality. It is only in the practice of critical self-reflection, which makes it possible to judge the cognitive subject in terms of what it lacks, that the world is disclosed in terms of suffering.

22. See the extended discussion of this idea on page 55 of this work.

23. My comments here follow the insightful discussion by Serge Gaubert (2000, 75–93).

24. Gérard Genette has argued that "metaphor is to art what reminiscence is to life, the conjoining of two sensations by the 'miracle of an analogy'" (1971, 170).

25. Similarly, in the 1962 lectures on philosophical terminology: "[philosophical terminology undergoes] a process of reification, that means, it is increasingly more released from a confrontation with its objects, and makes itself independent [*selbständig*]" (1973, 39).

26. Adorno provides a couple of explicit examples of this thesis. One concerns the "linguistic expression 'existence'" that in Hegel, Adorno claims, is "confused with what it designates" (1993b, 19). Existence, as a relation of thinking to what is not thought is thus spirited into thinking as a conceptual content. A further example is the treatment of sensation (*Empfindung*) in Kant (1966, 140–41). Again, Adorno's point is that a linguistic term that would seem to denote the dependence of concepts on the form of the nonconceptual is transformed into an inherent content of concepts.

27. This is not to be confused with the similar sounding distinction Adorno makes in *Negative Dialectic*. Schnädelbach has in mind the different between identity in respect of a particular property and qualitative identity.

28. Schnädelbach's suggestion that Adorno's striving to "move conceptually beyond the concept" constitutes a "preparation in thought of a new clearing of being [*Seinslichtung*]" (1987, 193) misses the mark because the disclosure of dependence is precisely what disenchants our conceptual language by tying it to the contingency of history.

CHAPTER 7. A CONTEMPORARY OUTBREAK ATTEMPT: JOHN MCDOWELL ON *MIND AND WORLD*

1. See Hammer (2000) and Finke (2001). I will deal more fully with these two contributions later.

2. McDowell does, however, characterize his project as a return to insights in Kant. He makes this argument by playing Kant off against Sellars. See McDowell (1998b).

3. In German critical theory, this concept usually has a negative sense as bound up with the reified structure of modern life. Lukács (1971) makes prominent use of it to describe capitalist modernity as a structure alienated from human subjectivity. As we saw, it is also a concept that figures in Proust. It must be borne in mind that McDowell's use of the term does not carry the negative connotations that it bears in this tradition. This will prove to be important when we address the question of critical experience in McDowell's account.

4. As Bernstein puts this: "If McDowell allows Adorno his setting in which the disenchantment of nature and the sway of scientific (logical/mathematical) reason are socially and historically actual (and not mere projections from mistaken philosophizing), then his transcendental point cannot be satisfying, cannot bring relief from the anxiety since the very thing he requires for his purposes, another (conception of)

nature, will remain actually unavailable and thereby necessarily in dispute" (2002, 218–19). In his reply to this point, McDowell asserts that "[i]t would surely be absurd to suggest that unmasking a scientistic conception of the natural as a prejudice . . . is not a sensible project until, say, capitalism has been overthrown" (2002, 298). The problem however, as Adorno sees it, is that disenchantment pervades social practices and structures our concepts. So the issue becomes one of how we are able to disclose how our concepts are themselves dependent on that structuring and those practices. I will argue that this insight forces us to take up issues concerned with language that are absent on McDowell's account.

5. For example, "[m]an imagines himself free from fear when there is no longer anything unknown" (1972a, 16).

6. The foil for this theory in *Mind and World* is Donald Davidson's "coherence theory of truth and knowledge."

7. "Comprehension" requires setting concepts to work differently from their everyday classificatory operations, and it is the experience of the thing as *not* identical with its concept that is supposed to set this process in motion. Establishing this point, I take it, is the main goal of the introduction to the *Phenomenology*.

8. Sean Kelly (2001) makes a similar point about the transcendental nature of McDowell's argument. However, there are serious questions about whether McDowell's approach really counts as transcendental in the Kantian sense. For a discussion on this, see Anita Leirfall (2003).

9. See, however, Sean Kelly (2001) for a criticism of McDowell in these terms.

10. In this sense, I think Christopher Norris is exactly right to say that the central issue is whether McDowell's Kantian solution is able to deliver the required outcome without reproducing the same dichotomies over again, or "without repeating certain episodes in Kant's continental reception history—early and late—which McDowell would surely consider too heavy a cost to be borne" (2000, 390).

11. I argued this point in detail in chapter 4.

12. We can still call this a transcendental solution, in so far as it concerns the conditions of possibility of philosophical problems. But the materialist twist is that these conditions are the conditions of social-historical experience.

13. For example, "Hegelian Reason does not need to be constrained from outside, precisely because it includes as a moment within itself the receptivity that Kant attributes to sensibility" (1998b, 466).

14. I cannot make this case here, but it is certainly Adorno's view. See, for example, Adorno (1993b, 86–87).

15. And also, of course, it does this while avoiding the Hegelian temptation to understand experience as the embodiment of reason.

16. Once this point is accepted, of course, a model of philosophical interpretation such as the one Adorno adopts seems to follow naturally.

17. Adorno, it seems to me, has things exactly right when he argues that "[I]f epistemology . . . dug the trench between matter and form, Hegel extends epistemology until it is obvious that it is not its place to dig trenches" (1993b, 65).

18. While I'm not suggesting that McDowell's account is equivalent to the latter, I am claiming that it does not have a satisfactory account of the former.

19. This point recaps the argument of chapter 6.

20. The idea of things "revealing" themselves through subjective responses is my gloss on McDowell's argument. It is implied, I believe, by assertions such as that "[s]econdary qualities are qualities not adequately conceivable except in terms of certain subjective states" (1998d, 136).

21. "Citizens of capitalist late modernity" will do fine as a definition of who "we" are.

22. It is surely something like this that Hegel is aiming at with the idea of the "way of despair," not an "unsettling of this or that supposed truth," but rather the "conscious insight into the untruth of appearing knowledge" as such (1948, 67).

23. Dewey seems to adopt an approach similar to McDowell in his depiction of the incremental revision of habit (1983, 90). This comparison would not be quite accurate, however, as I shall try to bring out through elucidating Dewey's theory of experience.

24. Similary, in his investigation of religious experience, Dewey argues that its operation depends on "the integration of the shifting scenes of the world into that imaginative totality we call the universe" (1962, 19).

25. This dependence of epistemology vis-à-vis the social-historical structuring of experience is also clearly expressed in the shortcomings of consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Epistemology leads into a discussion of self-consciousness and is eventually shown to be dependent on the social-historical organization of experience.

26. This sort of analysis, I believe, would be amenable to Dewey. Consider, for instance, his account of the transfigurative power of communication: "Letters, poetry, song, the drama, fiction, history, biography, engaging in rites and ceremonies hallowed by time and rich with the sense of countless multitudes that share in them, are also modes of discourse that, detached from immediate instrumental consequences of assistance and cooperative action, are ends for most persons. In them discourse is both instrumental and final. No person remains unchanged and has the same future efficiencies, who shares in situations made possible by communication" (1925, 168).

27. The same problem is found in Finke's suggestion that Adorno is committed to a picture of conceptual consciousness that "avoids the Cartesian divide or gap that results in the *alienation* of subjectivity and language with respect to the world" (2001, 174). On the view I am suggesting, epistemology can bring alienation to self-consciousness, but it cannot avoid it and remain epistemology.

CONCLUSION

1. In a passage in *After Virtue* concerned with the theory of ideology, MacIntyre states that "[i]f moral utterance is put to uses at the service of arbitrary will, it is some-

one's arbitrary will; and the question of *whose* will it is is obviously of both moral and political importance. But to answer that question is not my task here" (1985, 110). I suspect that if MacIntyre *were* to answer this question, his answer would differ from Adorno's in reading the arbitrary will as the self cut loose from social bonds, rather than the self as constituted by practices structured according to the logic of exchangeability.

2. J. M. Bernstein (2001) provides an account of Adorno's moral theory that emphasizes precisely this point.

3. Rationality, as Habermas puts it here, is concerned with "how speaking and acting subjects *acquire and use knowledge*" (1984, 8).

4. I would argue, although I cannot justify this here, that this is simply what "immanent" critique means: it is articulating a conceptual form to the point where it shows its own inadequacy.

5. That is to say, the disclosure of the dependence of a concept is not the same thing as, and not translatable into, a conceptual content.

6. Wellmer echoes Habermas's criticism, dealt with above, that Adorno "expresses the secret" of the philosophy of the subject, but does not "comprehend" it (1991, 73). That is, he cannot *say* it.

7. In a more recent work, Wellmer (1998) seems to have shifted his position somewhat, so that he now sees Adorno's reflections on language and rationality (rightly, I think) as concerned with questions of meaning lying at a deeper level than the distinction between instrumental and communicative uses of language. This concerns the "dialectics of the particular and the general as a problem of epistemology and the critique of language" (p. 262).

8. See, for example, the work of J. M. Bernstein (1995), Peter Dews (1995), and from a social-theoretical perspective, Axel Honneth (1986).

9. Undoubtedly a large part of the attraction of Habermas's communicative ethic, for example, is that it gives expression to the meaning of democratic citizenship.

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PHILOSOPHY

Adorno

The Recovery of Experience

Roger Foster

In *Adorno,* Roger Foster argues that there is a coherent critical project at the core of Adorno's philosophy of language and epistemology, the key to which is the recovery of a broader understanding of experience. Foster claims, in Adorno's writings, it is the concept of spiritual experience that denotes this richer vision of experience and signifies an awareness of the experiential conditions of concepts. By elucidating Adorno's view of philosophy as a critical practice that discloses the suffering of the world, Foster shows that Adorno's philosophy does not end up in a form of resignation or futile pessimism. Foster also breaks new ground by placing Adorno's theory of experience in relation to the work of other early twentieth-century thinkers, in particular Henri Bergson, Marcel Proust, Edmund Husserl, and early Wittgenstein.

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Roger Foster teaches philosophy at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, the City University of New York.

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